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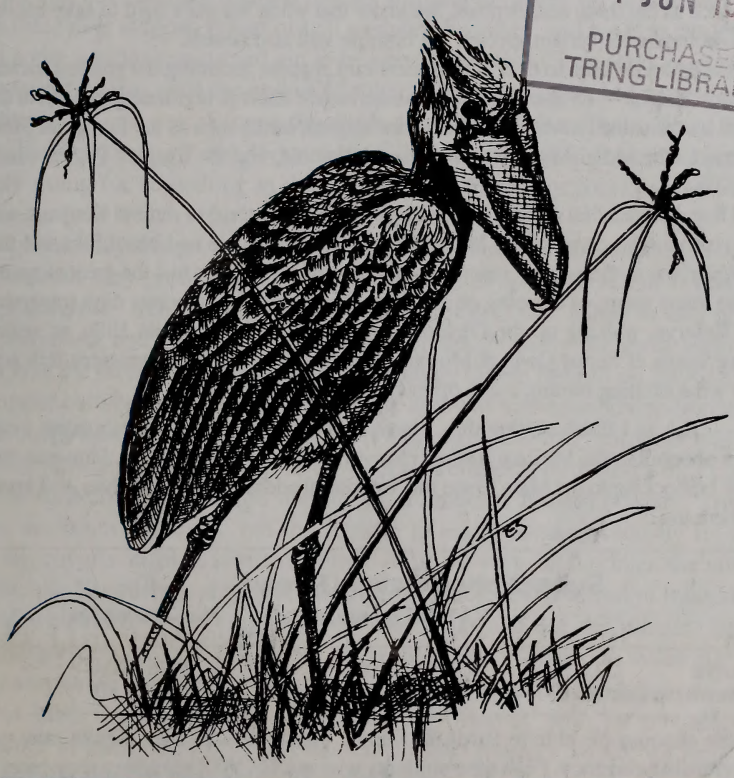

A joint publication of the Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya and BirdLife Kenya.

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Guest Editorial

Jorie Butler Kent
Chairman, Friends of Conservation

Friends of Conservation (FOC) is delighted to support the publication of this issue of *Kenya Birds*. Kenya is so blessed with the great number and variety of birds to be found within its borders: I think that all of us who have enjoyed this varied and sumptuous collection feel a great desire, and responsibility, to ensure that its health continues to be protected. In the 14 years that FOC has been involved in conservation in East Africa, we have devoted our main efforts to the Masai Mara and northern Serengeti. We feel that the Mara-Serengeti system is unique in many ways and needs as much assistance as possible to address the various problems that have arisen. Even though we have concentrated heavily on the large mammals such as the rhino and elephant, we know that when we work hard to save habitat and the environment for certain species, the bird life will also benefit.

The Masai Mara is home to over 300 resident bird species, including the greatest variety of cisticolas in Kenya — 13 species. It contains the largest tracts of highland grassland in the country and has remained a wonderful haven for migrant birds, such as the European Stork which comes to the Masai Mara to escape the winter cold, and the Caspian Plover which breeds in Asia.

We feel that a publication such as *Kenya Birds* will help continue to remind Kenyans, and the many visitors who come to the Masai Mara, what a valuable and beautiful asset this National Reserve is to the entire country. I know that anyone who has had the great pleasure, as I have so many times, of camping on the Mara River, spending glorious days traversing the entire Reserve, walking up the Ololoolu Escarpment or in the Loita Hills, or seeing exhilarating views of Scops Owls at Musiara Swamp will agree what treasures this area holds, and what exciting birding it can offer. Good birding!

P S — Just as I finish writing this, I have received news of the Mara's latest avian visitor — a Shoebill in the Musiara Swamp close to the Mara Serena Lodge. I am sure that birders will be flocking to the Mara to see this wonderful addition for themselves — I know I will be there too.

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Front cover illustration: Shoebill *Balaeniceps rex* from a vignette by Edwin Selempo. Typesetting and layout by BirdLife Kenya.

News from Kenya and abroad

Department of Ornithology

Of Grey-headed Negrofinches and Grosbeak Weavers...

The Nairobi Ringing Group (NBIRG) had its inaugural ringing session by the Nairobi River in the National Museum grounds on 16 June 1994 — and a memorable session it was! Being the first time the site has been used for ringing, we were loaded with birds (mainly weavers, with Holub's Golden introducing us to its wicked bite) and we realised that for training purposes we would only need two to three nets at most. It was not all weavers, however, and we also caught and ringed some species that turned out to be unusual — an African Pied Wagtail (the next was not caught until the end of October), Paradise Flycatcher (next one was in September) and two Bronze Sunbirds (only four others have been ringed since). To crown it all we 'bounced' an immature Augur Buzzard that was possibly going for something in the net! We also ringed the local pair of Fiscals and one juvenile which we have since re-trapped.

Since that day the group has ringed over 800 birds of 90+ species. The site does not look very promising at first glance: a bit of scrub (much of it Lantana) under *Eucalyptus* trees by the Nairobi River (sewer?), but it has in fact proved very interesting and produced some real surprises. Possibly the most surprising record was the Grey-headed Negrofinch ringed by Ogeto Mwebi on 20 August. It was caught between two patches of Lantana and was subsequently re-trapped on 24 October, this time in cracking adult plumage. Another surprise was two immature African Firefinches on 13 October — delightful birds and a nice change from the Red-billed Firefinches that are far commoner around Nairobi. The two species are often confused but the African is easily distinguished by its black under tail coverts, even in immature birds. A further surprise has been the number of Malachite Kingfishers ringed at just this one place: seven different individuals, none of which has been re-trapped. We often hear and see the resident pair of Giant Kingfishers along the river, but so far they have managed to avoid our nets! Not so surprising perhaps, but nice (?) to catch all the same has been one of the meanest birds we've ringed — the Grosbeak Weaver, with its powerful bill designed I'm sure, specifically to crunch ringers' fingers! So far we've ringed three and all have left their mark on one or other of us!

To date only five Palaearctic birds have been caught by the Group, two Willow Warblers (one being the first migrant we caught — ringed by Peter Njoroge on 1 October), a Reed Warbler, a Blackcap and a Marsh Warbler. We've seen several flocks of Eurasian Bee-eaters over the ringing site and both Common and Green Sandpipers along the river but have yet to catch one!

The small site by the Museum has proved excellent for training new ringers, being both handy to get to and with a good number of species for trainees to gain experience with. It has also been useful for starting to sort out the identification of some of the more difficult species (notably female and immature sunbirds, Singing vs. Red-faced Cisticolas etc.) and identifying characteristics for correct ageing of even the most common species. Eventually we hope to produce a publication on the identification and ageing of the species we have been catching so as to aid ringers in the future. More immediate plans are to start some constant effort ringing at the new IUCN site in Langata to monitor the local bird populations and to increase our knowledge of the avifauna of the dry forests around Nairobi. We aim to ring there twice a month as regularly as possible and thereby over time to build up a reasonable dataset for analysis. An initial 'recce' session was done in November: this proved very successful with 64 birds ringed of 18 species.

So far the Ringing Group has about 20 members, but anyone is welcome who is interested to learn more about how and why ringing is done. We ring most Thursdays and Saturdays and meet in the Ornithology Dept. of the Museum before hand — though it is worth checking on our schedule. For further information contact any of us in the Ornithology Department. — Colin *Jackson, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

Bird counts around the coastal creeks

The Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KMFRI) has embarked on ornithological surveys along the Kenya coast, and is training a small team of waterbird counters. From 5–16 September KMFRI organised a survey of some potentially important coastal bird areas, combined with a training exercise. The focus was on the tidal creeks between Malindi and Shimoni, with boat counts of six creeks and additional surveys of Sabaki River and beaches.

I joined the KMFRI ornithology crew — Gladys Moragwa, Priscilla Boura, Michael Goa and Jan Seys — on 12 September. We made a start away from the sea in the Arabuko-Sokoke forest. As usual forest birds are more easily heard than seen, so we sought expert assistance. We met David Ngala, Sokoke's most experienced bird guide, at Gede Forest Station and proceeded to the forest through the rain. Instead of his usual nocturnal hunt for the tiny Sokoke Scops Owl, he took us for a day hunt and at exactly 12:05 hours we saw our owl. Other birds of interest among the 41 species recorded were Little Spotted Woodpecker, Retz's Helmet Shrike, Chestnut-fronted Helmet Shrike, Amani Sunbird and Dark-backed Weaver.

The afternoon was spent observing waterbirds at Mida Creek, where we saw a total of 23 species including Black Heron, African Reef Heron, Great Sandplover, Mongolian Sandplover, Grey Plover, Curlew, Terek Sandpiper, Bar-tailed Godwit and Crab Plover.

Tuesday 13 September was spent at the Sabaki River mouth. On the mudbanks were spectacular flocks of terns and gulls, estimated as more than 2,600 birds in total, and large numbers of waders (estimated as around 2,400 birds). Twenty-two waterbird species were recorded at the site.

The rest of the period was spent counting by boat at Port Reitz, Mtwapa Creek and Gazi Bay. One could not avoid noticing the incredible decline of the mangrove forests as a result of massive clear felling. Tighter control of mangrove harvesting is urgently needed.

Mtwapa Creek and Gazi Bay each held 12 waterbird species, whereas Port Reitz held 23. The highest number of individuals was recorded at Port Reitz (615), followed by Mtwapa (543) and then Gazi Bay (247). — *Joseph Oyugi, Department of Ornithology, P O Box 40658 Nairobi.*

Indicator species at Elangata Wuas

The Elangata Wuas area, in Kajiado District, was surveyed for five days on 25–29 July 1994. The bird survey was part of an exercise to try out diverse environmental monitoring methods for the Elangata Wuas Ecosystem Management Programme. Soil degradation is the biggest problem in this otherwise attractive rangeland area. The Programme is investigating scientific methods of assessing the extent of soil degradation and how this affects biodiversity. Assisted by the able parataxonomists of the Programme, I carried out a set of rapid surveys during this week. Timed species counts (TSCs) were used to census the birds. This method was preferable to a fixed transect since it allowed greater flexibility in route and therefore ensured more complete coverage of the study block. A reasonable amount of data was collected from four sites (Oletepesi, Oletepesi Maura's farm, Oloigerumo and Ildepen) with different range conditions, one of which also had a different soil type to the others. Sixty-one species of birds were recorded, some of which seemed to show a substantial response to range conditions (the range condition index ranged from 1.2–2.45), acting as either decreaser or increaser indicator species. The responsive species included d'Arnaud's Barbet, Red-winged Bush Lark, White-winged Scrub Robin and Eastern Violet-backed Sunbird. These results are preliminary, however; a longer study would yield more convincing data for particular indicator species. — *George Amutete, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

Ornithology staff train forest managers in survey techniques

From 2–16 November 1994 the GEF Regional Biodiversity Project held a training workshop in biodiversity inventory techniques. The participants were mainly forest managers and botanists from the three East African countries. Training was carried in the field at Kakamega Forest Reserve and Mount Elgon National Park.

Two Ornithology Department staff, Joseph Oyugi and Patrick Gichuki, took part and demonstrated techniques for surveying and monitoring forest birds, including mist-netting and point counts. We also demonstrated the use of play-back for bird identification: Equatorial Akalat and Yellow-billed Barbet were called in for a closer view by the participants.

The participants noted with interest the usefulness of birds in helping to monitor environmental changes. — *Joseph Oyugi, P O Box 40658 Nairobi*

RSPB to support grassland bird study

The conservation of the montane grasslands of central Kenya has, so far, received relatively little attention. However, the habitat is largely unprotected and is vanishing at an alarming pace. Two restricted-range bird species are confined to these grasslands: Sharpe's Longclaw *Macronyx sharpei* and Jackson's Widowbird *Euplectes jacksoni*, both endemic to Kenya and listed as near-threatened by BirdLife International. Although it appears likely that the populations of both species are in decline, remarkably little is known about their status or the actual degree of threat.

A team from the Department of Ornithology made a brief survey of grasslands on the Kinangop Plateau on 31 October 1994. We started at the southern end and moved up to around Njabini. All grassland areas that we saw were checked for the presence of either species. We found reasonable numbers of Sharpe's Longclaw in steep areas along small stream valleys, which apparently were little grazed by cattle. We saw Long-tailed but not Jackson's Widowbirds; this species is known from the plateau but appears to be seasonal in its occurrence.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (the BirdLife Partner in the United Kingdom) has now kindly agreed to support a year-long study of these two species in the Kinangop. As a first stage, two long transects of 10–30 km will be set up to quarter the study area. Each will be counted monthly, and all sightings of either species will be mapped. Observations on behaviour will be made whenever the birds are sighted, especially if nesting is observed. Contact will also be made with interested local residents and wildlife clubs to try and gather additional data on the birds' distribution and behaviour.

In parallel with this study, the Department of Ornithology will be gathering all records of these two species from around the country for its computerised database. This will help give a better picture of the current status of both species, and of their seasonality and movements. If readers have records of either species for known dates and sites, we would very much appreciate receiving them.

As a second stage, not yet funded, we hope to carry out a more detailed study of the effects of land use on the distribution and viability of both species, involving an ecological study on a large set of study plots with varying land use. This in-depth study will probably be carried out by a Kenyan postgraduate student. — *Luc Lens, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

Survey of Kwale forests completed

The coast forest survey team — Edward Waiyaki, Patrick Gichuki and Kuria Ndung'u — wound up fieldwork at the end of August 1994 after completing rapid bird surveys of thirteen forests in Kwale District. Apart from the Shimba Hills, surveyed earlier, these included all the most important kayas and forest reserves in the district. Highlights were records of Spotted Ground Thrush from Waa, Gandini and Mrima, and Sokoke Pipit from Gandini, Dzombo and Marenje. Another threatened species, Equatorial Akalat, was absent from all the forests that were surveyed — surprising, since it appears to occur in good numbers in Longomagandi and Mkongani forests in the Shimba Hills. Five sites are proposed as Globally Important Bird Areas based on the most recent criteria drawn up by BirdLife International.

Luhya ethno-ornithology

Fieldwork for this project, which was spread over eight months, has come to an end. The districts of Western Province — Kakamega, Bungoma, Busia and Vihiga — formed the study area. People from all walks of life, but especially the elderly, were interviewed, and selected schools given slide lectures touching on bird identification, the importance of birds for biodiversity conservation, propagation of culture and other cultural and scientific uses of birds. In Musingu High School the headmaster has now set aside the school 'forest' for students to begin some small-scale conservation projects focusing on birds. The teacher-in-charge requested assistance to start a bird project and stimulate interest in this field among the students.

The data are now being compiled and analysed and a full report prepared. — *George Amutete, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

Nairobi Ringing Group at Ngulia, 1994

As is well known, Ngulia Safari Lodge during November and December each year is host to what must be one of the most spectacular displays of bird ringing in the world.

Arriving at the lodge in the afternoon on a quiet day, you would be forgiven for wondering if you had come to right place: a thorough search of the lodge grounds may turn up but one Marsh Warbler in terms of migrants. This impression is dispelled when, after dinner while you are sitting drinking coffee, a thick mist rolls quietly up from over the escarpment and obscures the bushes and trees only 30–40 m away. Almost immediately you can notice birds flying across and fluttering around the bright game-viewing lights, some flying right into the dining room and bar of the lodge. The birds are being drawn down by the lights and it is time to put the nets up and start catching.

A group of six members of the Ornithology Dept. and Nairobi Ringing Group were able to join in the Ngulia ringing from 3–6 December thanks to funding generously made available through the Ngulia Ringing Group. The group was made up of James Wachira, Joseph Oyugi, Peter Njoroge, Ogeto Mwebi and Colin Jackson, with Luc Lens and his wife Veerle arriving a day later. For all except Joseph it was our first experience of Ngulia and we were fortunate to hit one of the busiest periods of the season.

On most nights the mist came in at around midnight and the birds followed almost immediately. Three nets were then set; catching often started as they were going up and continued through to dawn, when 16 nets in the scrub around the lodge were opened. Catching then extended until mid-day on most days. Over the four days we were there, around 4,000 migrants were ringed with 1,600+ on 5 December. The proportions of the commoner species caught followed the usual Ngulia pattern, the most numerous being Marsh Warbler with c. 1100 ringed on 5 December — the first time that more than 1000 birds of a species have been ringed on a single day at Ngulia. The other common species were Whitethroat and Sprosser, with relatively good numbers (c. 20 in a day) of Iranias. Other migrant species that were caught on most days but in smaller numbers were Spotted Flycatcher, Basra Reed Warbler, the Hippolais warblers Olivaceous *H. pallida*, Upcher's *H. languida* and Olive-tree *H. olivetorum*, Willow Warbler and Red-backed Shrike. Odd ones and twos were caught on different days of Nightingale *L. megarhynchos* (of both races *africana* and *hafizi)*, European Nightjar, Red-tailed Shrike, Garden Warbler, and Blackcap. Good numbers of Black and White Cuckoos were also caught and several others seen moving through the area. There was only one control (recapture) (which turned out to be the only one of the season), a Marsh Warbler with a Belgian ring, caught on 5 December. Several interesting Afrotropical species were ringed over the four days including several Didric Cuckoos, Button Quail and Pygmy Kingfisher.

I was fortunate to be able to stay on for another week until the end of the ringing period on 14 December. By the time we packed up 10,902 Palaearctic migrants had been ringed since the start of the season. Several notable birds were caught in the last week — the first Eurasian Sparrowhawk to be ringed at Ngulia (and in East Africa?), two Eurasian Cuckoos, three Great Reed Warblers, the second and third Reed Warblers for the year and one of the local pair of Lanner Falcons, in a net set up to catch the Little Swifts that nest under the eaves of the lodge. Another unusual Afrotropical species was an immature female Green-backed Twinspot, and without doubt the meanest bird caught was a Grey-headed Bush-shrike! — *Colin Jackson, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

Lake Ol Bolossat Workshop

From 11–13 November, the Kenya Crane and Wetland Project organised a community workshop at Lake Ol Bolossat in Nyandarua District. The workshop was held at Iria-ini Primary School; its aims were to provide information on the ecological and economic significance of the lake, stimulate community participation in the conservation and wise use of its resources, and share ideas on how to manage the basin. The main focus was on women and youth groups; 41 participants were registered and many others attended as observers. Resource-people came from WWF, KWS, WCK and Kipsaina Wetland Group. Several resolutions were passed to promote conservation and wise use of the basin, whose problems have been highlighted in past issues of *Kenya Birds*. — *Cecilia Gichuki, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

Department welcomes new researcher

Luc Lens, who holds a PhD in science from Antwerp University, joined the Department in September 1994 as a Senior Research Scientist. This post is supported by the Flemish Association for Development Co-operation and Technical Assistance (V.V.O.B.). Luc's interests are in behavioural ecology (his doctoral work was on the social behaviour of Crested Tits), and he is also a very keen birdwatcher.

Postgraduate students in the Department

Two MSc students attached to the Department — Peter Njoroge, working on Hinde's Babblers, and Munir Virani, working on Sokoke Scops Owls — have now successfully completed their MSc theses. A third, staff member Edward Waiyaki, is presently finishing his thesis on coastal forest birds at the University of Kent.

Munir is now beginning research work for his doctorate at Leicester University, looking this time at the ecology of Augur Buzzards around Lake

Naivasha. Also based at Naivasha and registered for his PhD at Leicester is Brooks Childress, who will be studying the comparative ecology of the two cormorant species that use the lake.

Peregrine Fund project to continue

The Kenya component of the Pan-African Raptor Conservation Project (PARC) has received funding to allow education and research work on raptors to continue for a further two years. The Kenyan project is a joint initiative between the Peregrine Fund, Inc. and the National Museums of Kenya, and is co-ordinated by local raptor expert Simon Thomsett.

Game Bird Project: An update

Two hundred kilometres south-east of Nairobi the small market centre of Mbirikani, a cluster of wood and corrugated iron structures, materialises over the brow of a hill some fifty kilometres along the Emali-Loitokitok road. There has been no rain here for the last six months and everything is dirty white from the dust. A whirlwind suddenly materialises and stops on the road, I imagine, to make sure the dust enters my ears and eyes and nose and coats the newly cleaned lenses of my binoculars. It then moves on as if to say "welcome back".

There is none of the familiar mooing of cattle, as they have been moved far to the east into the Chyulu Hills and beyond or to the edge of the Amboseli National Park in search of better pasture. Birds too seem to only make half-hearted calls; maybe there is nothing to sing about these days. A resident group of Helmeted Guineafowl is busy, scratching the ground and moving on. A pair of enterprising chickens kept by a shop-owner join them. Another pair had been carried away by jackals the previous day, I am told. Maybe they need a few lessons on survival from their wild relatives.

We are on Mbirikani Group Ranch, with an area of about 125,000 hectares. The habitat on most of this ranch is ideal for the ground nesting Yellow-necked Spurfowl and Helmeted Guineafowl, which are both found in large numbers here. There are extensive expanses of *Acacia mellifera* bush; providing cover during the heat of the day, protecting eggs and nests from being destroyed by livestock, and sheltering the young from marauding jackals and birds of prey. The bush is criss-crossed by cattle tracks. The cattle trample the dry soil and loosen it so the birds can scratch out their main food, sedge corms. During the wet season dung from hundreds of cattle and wild animals enables the sedge to thrive, providing a food store for the birds for the following year.

It looks like a reliable, time-tested ecological balance. But how can it be kept that way in the face of an increasing human population, with suggestions that the

Acacia mellifera bushes be cleared to make way for more pasture and that the ranch be subdivided into what must definitely be economically unsustainable parcels of land? Part of the answer lies in taking into consideration the people's interests.

'Consumptive utilisation' and specifically sport hunting of the birds may be a controversial method of conservation. However, it is in everybody's interest that if it is allowed then it should be in a way that can be monitored.

The gamebird project on Mbirikani group ranch is almost a year old. The first phase, completed in April 1994, developed a set of guidelines to assist the group ranch in management of gamebird hunting and habitat. Recommendations for modification of the booking system, regulation of hunters in the field and collection of data on gamebird densities and habitat condition were made to Kenya Wildlife Service. These were based on a survey of Kenya's resident hunters, a review of the booking and licensing system and development of methods for estimating densities of the birds.

A second phase of the project was begun in May 1994 to monitor the implementation of the recommendations as they affect Mbirikani group ranch. This was made possible by a grant from the African Wildlife Foundation. The project was planned in consultation with the Community Wildlife Service at KWS and the ranch committee. This phase will allow methods to be developed for working with the community in the management of gamebird hunting.

To date, permanent transects have been set up on the ranch to be used for estimation of gamebird densities and analysis of habitat. Transects will be run at least once a month by two field assistants permanently employed by the group ranch. Data collected by these assistants will provide a continuous feedback on densities of gamebirds and habitat condition all over the ranch.

The assistants have also been trained to use point counts and flushing of birds as census techniques. They report monthly on observations of pairing and nest building and obtain birds from hunters for examination of reproductive organs, allowing an assessment of reproductive status. This is important information that can be used in determining the shooting seasons. The field assistants also check receipts and vehicles to ensure that bag limits are adhered to. They will also be available for any other group ranch duties assigned by the committee.

Where does the money to do all this come from? The whole monitoring and hunting management system has been set up in a way that it is self-sustaining. The group ranch directly negotiated with a tour operator to guarantee a minimum amount of money in a year in exchange for being appointed the booking agent.

Fees for booking the ranch for shooting of the birds were also significantly increased. This reduced the number of hunters on the ranch by half but increased

the income from the activity fivefold. The money earned is enough to meet all the recurrent costs. A kind donation of bicycles, uniforms and binoculars from a well wisher has adequately equipped the field assistants for the monitoring task ahead of them. The birds should be happier knowing there will be people to look after their welfare all the time. A third project phase to extend the project to other group ranches in Kajiado District begins in January 1995.

A new threat to the birds has, however, emerged. Laid in a perfect straight line across the plains are two giant water pipelines moving water from the Nolturesh springs at the foot of Mt Kilimanjaro to several towns along the Mombasa Road. Along the pipelines are numerous offtake points suitably located to serve both humans and livestock. The spill-off from these points serves as a source of water to many wildlife species but has also found a new use for irrigation.

Enterprising locals have hired people from a neighbouring country to set up small plots and grow food crops for sale. To keep out wild herbivores these plots are fenced using cut thorn bushes. But the game birds, particularly Yellow-necked Spurfowl, fly in and reportedly scratch out onion and cabbage seedlings. Given a chance, the birds prefer to walk in through gaps in the fences. The gaps are designed in a way to lure the birds into traps where they are killed. That is lunch and dinner for the hired labour taken care of.

At present levels, this activity may not affect the gamebird population on the ranch, but poses a significant threat if commercialised. Project field assistants have been busy convincing plot owners that a loss of revenue may result next year if there are not enough birds in the wild for sustainable shooting by hunters. Some of the plot owners have stopped their employees trapping the birds, but the activity goes on at a reduced level, especially at night.

This project has focused only on two species, the Yellow-necked Spurfowl and Helmeted Guineafowl, and in only one district, Kajiado. However, sport hunting of birds goes on in many other places, mainly in communal land areas. Several groups of birds are affected: sandgrouse, doves pigeons, ducks and quail. The goal of this project is eventually to evolve into an advisory research centre for gamebirds based at the Department of Ornithology. The centre will compile and provide appropriate information on gamebirds including their sustainable use. — Alfred Simiyu, P *O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

How appropriate are gamebird open seasons?

The open seasons for gamebirds — when particular species may be hunted — are defined by law for particular parts of the country. The idea behind this is that breeding birds should be left undisturbed by hunters. However, there is little information on when birds actually breed, and how this may differ from year to

year and place to place. The African Wildlife Foundation is supporting a six-month study that will look at these questions, through analysis of data collected from shot birds over a 20-year period by hunter John Sutton. The data refer to the size of the gonads, which provides a good indication of breeding condition. Since the beginning of November 1994 Peter Njoroge has been collating the data, and preliminary analyses are now underway.

Kestrel research at Lake Baringo, Kenya

Anthony van Zyl, Curator of Birds at the Transvaal Museum, South Africa, visited Kenya in July to carry out field work on Kestrels. He is comparing the birds' time budgets in equatorial and southern temperate areas. George Amutete and James Wachira of the Department accompanied him in turn to the study site at Lake Baringo. Four pairs of Kestrels were observed: although they were not breeding, copulation was seen, indicating that they would likely be nesting soon. The birds were watched along the high cliffs to the West of the lake, between the time they emerged from their roost holes at dawn until they retired again at dusk each day — usually about six to seven hours of observation was possible.

Ornithological Sub-committee

OS-c celebrates 150th meeting

The Ornithological Sub-committee held its 150th meeting on 20 December 1994. This represents a remarkable record of ornithological work and achievement that has seen the publication of B*irds of East Africa*, eighteen volumes of *Scopus*, sixteen annual bird reports for East Africa, numerous ornithological supplements, and check-lists for the three East African countries (a revision of the East African list is now well in hand). *Kenya Birds* congratulates the OS-c on this occasion.

New *Scopus* issues

Two recent issues of *Scopus* — numbers 17(2) and 18(1) — contain a feast of East African ornithology. Papers cover topics ranging from waterbirds at Lake Turkana and raptors in western Tanzania to threatened species in the East Usambaras, forest birds on Kilimanjaro and migrants in Ethiopia. Short notes cover a variety of interesting records of range and behaviour. Subscriptions to vol. 18 of *Scopus* are KSh 600/- for Kenya residents (KSh 650/- up-country); to subscribe, or for details of rates outside Kenya, contact Don Turner, P O Box 48019, Nairobi.

BirdLife Kenya

'Birds of a feather'

BirdLife Kenya sponsored an exhibition of bird art in metal and oils by Kioko Mwitiki and Steve Njenga, which took place at Charlie's Coffee Garden in Karen from 14–24 July. Around 100 people attended the opening evening, when the exhibition was launched with speeches by Nathan Gichuki and Frank Sutton. By the end of the exhibition over KSh 16,000/- had been raised for bird conservation: this success was largely due to the hard work of Sally Crafter, who managed to ensure that all the arrangements went smoothly despite a number of early setbacks.

World's first captive-bred Crowned Eagle

On 2 August 1994 the world's first captive-born Crowned Eagle chick hatched in Simon Thomsett's Raptor Holding Facility at Athi River. The parents were 'Rosie', a male bird held by Simon since 1978, when it was brought to him with a broken wing, and a female who was removed from Elgeyo Marakwet in 1985 after being accused of taking livestock.

The chick is a male, now fully grown. In October Simon attempted to place the chick in the nest of the Crowned Eagle pair at Ololua, but unfortunately this hair-raising operation was not successful — the chick was not adopted by the wild Crowned Eagles, and had to be retrieved. It now will be released at Ngare Ndare, where Peter and Alison Cadow will 'hack it back' to the wild.

Kenyan naturalists open home to wayward birds

Eighteen years ago a small bird found its way into Peter and Greta Davey's home and heart. Four months old and retrieved from a damaged nest, this little Bateleur Eagle did not stay small long. It grew to a full size and, thanks to Peter and Greta, has had a full life. This was the Daveys' first experience of raising and rehabilitating birds. When word got around that there was a couple in Langata willing to accept injured birds, they soon became a way station for displaced animals.

Today, visitors to the Daveys' home in Athi River are greeted by the same Bateleur Eagle, plus a myriad of other species, captive and free-living. The Daveys' garden is a mix of hundreds of indigenous and exotic plant species scattered across green lawns amidst the parched plains of Athi River. These colourful gardens attract hundreds of birds, with over two hundred species recorded to date. Some of these avian 'visitors' were released by the Daveys after successful rehabilitation and apparently decided that the gardens were a fine place to stay.

During the last 18 years, the Daveys have received an untold number of birds from various sources. They include the victims of road accidents, habitat encroachment, natural calamities and poaching. For the past five years, birds have also been sent from the KSPCA and a local veterinarian.

The Daveys have received each bird with the goal of rehabilitation and release. The vast majority of their efforts have led to success. They have taken in eagles, buzzards, goshawks, owls, cranes, nightjars, mousebirds, rollers, turacos, flycatchers, swallows, sunbirds... the list goes on and on. They have had special success with owls and have released eight Barn Owls, six Grass Owls, two Marsh Owls, ten Wood Owls and five Spotted Eagle Owls. Many species of eagle have passed through their aviaries, too: Tawny, African Hawk, Long-crested and Crowned, to mention just a few.

Not all of the Daveys' wards can be released. Many have suffered irreparable damage. They are given a permanent home in the extensive aviaries that the Daveys have built, using their own funds. Each is taken care of for the duration of its natural life. Some, like the Bateleur, seem to find it such an agreeable existence that they enjoy it as long as possible.

Peter and Greta are Kenyan naturalists, interested and involved in all aspects of the natural world. Peter is well known as a bird photographer, with one of the most extensive and complete collections of slides of Kenyan birds. Together they have committed themselves to spreading awareness of conservation through their first love, birds. They are now working to rebuild their aviaries and to construct an environmental education centre around them, so that school children from throughout Kenya will be able to experience the thrill and adventure of learning about the natural world. BirdLife Kenya supports this project and looks forward to working closely with the Daveys in the future.

If you would like further information about the Daveys' work with birds, or about the planned education centre, please feel free to contact them at Box 41822, Nairobi or tel. (0150) 22283. — Lisa Be*ltz, P O Box 40990, Nairobi*

Kenya Wetlands Working Group

Waterbird counts, July 1994

On the weekend of 16–17 July 1994, over 80 volunteer birdwatchers took part in the mid-year waterbird count at Lake Nakuru. A training session was carried-out on the evening of 16 July and the actual count on the morning of 17 July. It was a chilly, hazy and damp morning and the lake level was relatively low. Unfortunately the aerial count that was scheduled to take place simultaneously with the ground count failed — the aeroplane refused to start!

About 255,000 waterbirds of 47 species were counted — 253,600 of them Lesser Flamingos. Greater Flamingos numbered only 142. The number of Lesser Flamingos was much lower than in some previous counts; some may have moved to Lake Bogoria where 1,579,000 flamingos were estimated by Geoffrey Howard, Sally Crafter and William Kimosop during a ground count done on 23 July 1994.

Aerial counts of Lesser Flamingos were carried out at Lakes Nakuru and Elmenteita on 9 July 1994 by Geoffrey Howard, Oliver Nasirwa, Alfred Kisee and Robert Ndetei. At Nakuru 148,000 flamingos were counted plus another 21,000 at Lake Elmenteita. Fifty thousand flamingos were estimated at Magadi in another aerial count carried out by Geoffrey Howard and Sally Crafter.

Similar aerial counts were carried out for Tanzania's major sites on 20 July 1994. Lake Natron had around 1,000,000 flamingos, Embakai Crater another 1,000,000, Lake Manyara 100,000, Nogorongoro Crater 2,000 and Lake Burungi 20,000. Lake Eyasi was dry.

Putting together these figures, Kenya had about 1.9 million flamingos in July 1994 and Tanzania about 2.1 million, giving a total of 4 million birds in the major flamingo sites of both countries. — Oliv*er Nasirwa, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

New computer for wetlands database

The Flemish Association for Development Co-operation and Technical Assistance has generously provided funds to allow KWWG to buy a new computer for the wetland database. The previous machine (which, sadly. was stolen earlier this year) was not powerful enough to run up-to-date software compatible with the National Museums' database system. National Museums' staff have been assisting KWWG to develop a database in Microsoft Access, which is now functional.

International

XXI BirdLife International World Conference

The XXI BirdLife International World Conference was held from 12–18 August in Rosenheim, Germany. The conference was the first under the new 'BirdLife International' banner, and brought together more than 450 conservationists from 81 countries — demonstration of the strength and diversity of the BirdLife network.

Kenya was represented by Nathan and Cecilia Gichuki. An important formal step was taken when the East Africa Natural History Society signed up as one of fourteen new BirdLife partners. Bird conservation work will continue to be co-ordinated through the Society's sub-committee, BirdLife Kenya.

PAOC 9 moves to Ghana...

The next Pan-African Ornithological Congress — the ninth — will be held in Accra, Ghana from 1–8 December 1996. The decision was taken during a meeting of the PAOC Committee at the International Ornithological Congress in Vienna in August. Further information can be obtained from the Congress Chairman, Yaa Ntiamoa-Baidu, Ghana Wildlife Society, P O Box 13252, Accra, Ghana.

...and IOC to Durban

Looking further ahead, the world's premier bird event, the International Ornithological Congress, itself comes to Africa for the first time in 1998. The city of Durban, in South Africa, will play host to a thousand or more ornithologists from all over the world.

Conserving the Masai Mara: the role of FOC

Onesmas Kahindi
P O Box 59749, Nairobi

The Masai Mara National Reserve was gazetted in 1948 and covers approximately 1510 km^2. Its varied habitats include rolling savannahs of red oat and other grasses, acacia woodlands and riverine forests along the courses of the Mara, Talek and Sekenani Rivers. These habitats harbour a great diversity of plants and animals, including more than 400 species of birds.

Since 1982, Friends of Conservation (FOC) has invested large amounts of material, human and financial resources to conserve wildlife and its habitat in the Mara. Specific projects include:

Tourist education

A large acreage of vegetation has been destroyed by vehicle tracks, especially by tour vans combing bushes and thickets or trying to get close to a cheetah, lion or rhino. This practice is being discouraged through tourist education pamphlets and regular vehicle patrols. FOC has also published a well-researched Guidebook to the Reserve with an accompanying Bird Checklist.

Ecological monitoring

FOC established an ecological monitoring programme in 1984 to collect scientific information on rainfall patterns, vegetation changes and animal population trends. The data are analysed and used to design management plans for the Reserve. A fire-management plan based on this ecological information will soon be implemented.

Rhino monitoring and surveillance

An independent monitoring and surveillance programme for Black Rhinoceros was started in 1987. The Reserve wardens and rangers assist the staff to monitor

inside the reserve, while local people are involved outside the reserve in the Naikarra and Laleta areas to the south-east. This programme has been effective: the number of rhinos has increased from 11 in 1987 to 37 in 1994.

Community programme

FOC directs a community conservation programme in the group ranches surrounding the Mara Reserve to encourage natural resource conservation by the pastoral community.

The Mara wildlife migrates seasonally to the ranches. Large areas of their former dispersal area have been converted into wheat farms. The human population is increasing steadily, and more villages and trading centres are developing. The ranches also house most of the tourist camps. Both the local people and the tourist industry depend on firewood for cooking and heating. As a result of these pressures, overgrazing, deforestation and human-wildlife conflicts are concerns for conservation outside the Reserve.

The FOC Community Programme addresses some of these issues through its community conservation extension with women's groups and village elders, and education activities in schools. Village conservation committees to mobilise awareness activities are being formed, comprised of local chiefs, teachers and women's group leaders. Through workshops and seminars, Mara lodge and camp managers, tour operators and campsite owners are sensitised on the importance of waste management and energy conservation.

The success of these continuing programmes is important for the Mara's birds, as habitat is preserved, education is encouraged and conservation awareness is raised. Many school children are learning about birds by observing bird feeders made by Wildlife Club members. Their indigenous knowledge of the birds' natural history is an added advantage, enhanced by the Maasai elders who volunteer to lecture about cultural methods of wildlife conservation — courtesy of the community programme.

Request for sightings of Clarke's Weavers

For three years, from 1989 to 1992, I collected information on the birds of Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, including the curious and poorly known Clarke's Weaver *Ploceus golandi*. I am now collating all my observations of Clarke's Weaver and I would be interested to learn of any other unpublished records, especially for the period December to March when the birds are rarely seen in Arabuko-Sokoke. Please send any details of date, number of birds and other relevant information (for example if they were seen associating with other species, like helmet-shrikes) to me at the following address: *John H. Fanshawe, BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge CB3 ONA, United Kingdom* or care of the Department of Ornithology, Nairobi. I will acknowledge your letters.

Birding in and around the Masai Mara

Brian Finch
P O Box 59749, Nairobi

This south-west corner of Kenya, so well known for its abundant big game, has not been recognised for its equally varied and abundant birdlife. Over five hundred species have been recorded from the region, including many that are found in few or no other parts of Kenya. Some of these special species include Rufous-bellied Heron, Ovampo Sparrowhawk, Red-necked Spurfowl, Denham's Bustard, Schalow's Turaco *Tauraco schalowi*, Sooty and Red-tailed Chats, Tabora, Rock-loving and Trilling Cisticolas, Pale Wren Warbler *Calamonastes undosus*, Yellow-bellied Hyliota and Magpie Shrike. Other species have very distinct Mara populations, such as the Little Spotted and Golden-tailed Woodpeckers, Red-capped Robin Chat, Green-capped Eremomela and Little Purple-banded Sunbird.

I have split the Mara and its surrounding areas into four sections, divided according to habitat and the birds that you can expect to see. The richest area by far is centred on the Oloololo Gate in the north-west. This is a meeting place of varied habitats, and most of the area's species have been recorded from here.

Also productive is the western slopes of the Loita Hills, north of the Sekenani Gate. This dry, scrubby part of the Mara has very different birds to the wetter western parts, and an equally good number of specialities.

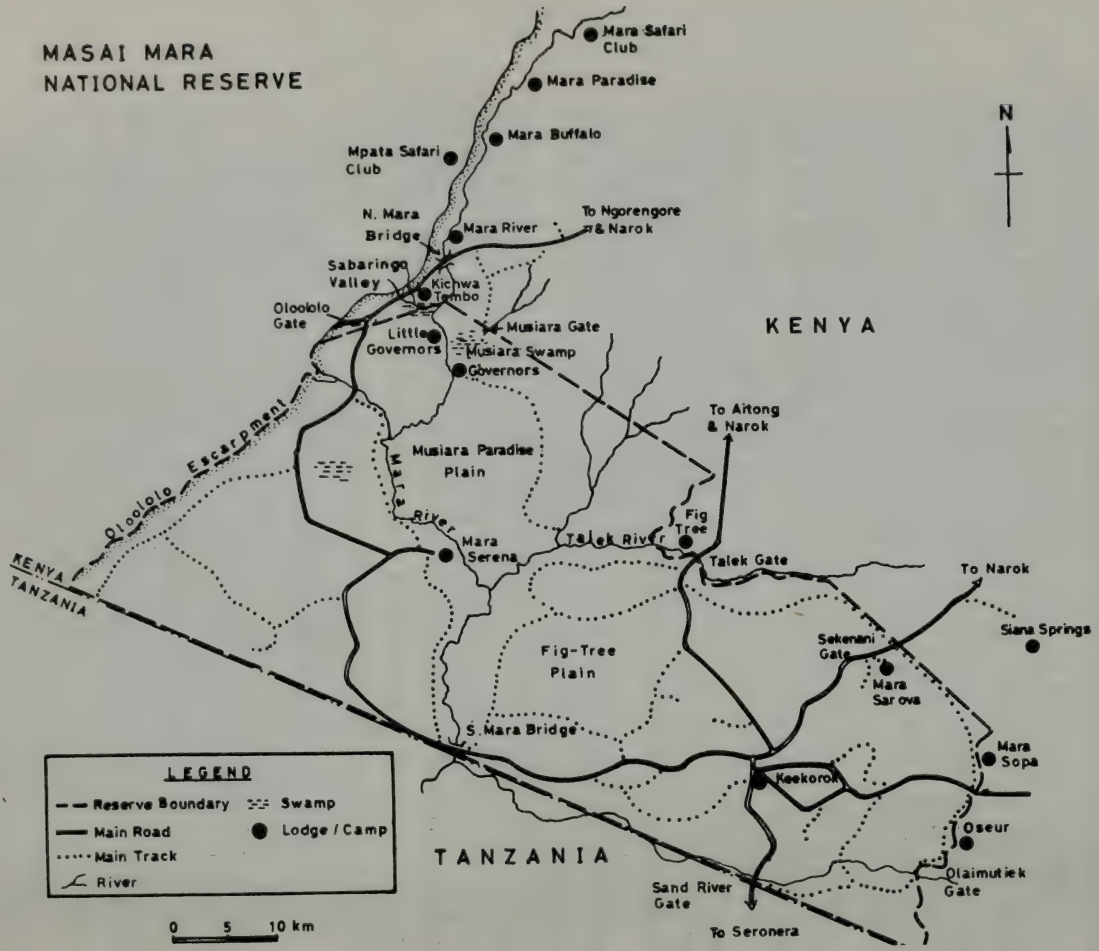
The Mara's most important wetland is Musiara Swamp near Musiara Gate. When conditions are right, a whole host of uncommon species may be found here.

The Mara is excellent for birding at any time. Between November and February, however, is when migrants flood into the area and when unexpected species can turn up. Raptor passage can be heavy in the north-west and heavy falls of warblers can occur in early December.

Oloololo Escarpment Region

The top of the Oloololo Escarpment and plateau

This area may be reached from the Sabaringo Valley road, which climbs the sides of the Sabaringo Valley, starting between the back of Kichwa Tembo Camp and the Sabaringo Ford. It can also be accessed on the KGGCU road from Migori but this is a complex and circuitous route. Within this area there are four main subdivisions:



Map drawn by Dennis Milewa

The Oloolo Escarpment Edge

Once you have climbed the Sabaringo Valley Road, there are several tracks leading to the edge of the Escarpment. The best one to follow takes a sharp right shortly before a conspicuous kopje. Follow this to the edge and search just over the rim for the secretive Rock-loving Cisticolas. The nearby rocky slopes of the kopje are also a good site for this elusive species. Senegal Plovers may be seen at times on the grassy areas, and Long-billed Pipits are resident. The views over the Mara are breathtaking, and birds of prey take advantage of the updrafts. Looking down on Bateleurs provides a rare thrill!

Stunted Acacia woodland with emergents

From the immediate top of the escarpment as far as Mpata Club to the west of the road is an extensive woodland of stunted *Acacias*, with numerous emergents. The woodland holds *Acacia*-dependent species such as Red-throated Tit, Brown Parisoma and Buff-bellied Warbler. Other species common here are Red-throated Wryneck, Brubru, Sooty Chat and Speckle-fronted Weaver. The Pale Wren Warbler, a local speciality, is also frequently seen.

Evergreen forest beyond the escarpment

Further west from the *Acacia* woodland, coming closer to the escarpment edge beyond Mpata Club, is an area of dense forest. Still further west this becomes mosaic woodland, with seasonally inundated grassland dotted with clumps of trees on higher ground.

This region is largely unexplored, but harbours several species associated with western forests, such as the Snowy-headed Robin Chat, Grey-winged Ground Robin and Little Greenbul. Other interesting species include Abyssinian Hill Babbler, Black-throated Apalis and Fawn-breasted Waxbill.

The Migori River and associated streams

The road on top of the escarpment continues past the Mpata Club. Around 10 km further on are the large KGGCU grain storage silos, and the good murram road continues 20 km westwards before reaching a T-junction. Turn left and carry on for 1 km to reach a small river with patchy dense scrub along the banks. Species such as Mackinnon's Shrike, Yellow-throated Leaflove and Black-crowned Waxbill can be seen here, as far south as they occur in Kenya. Blue-headed Coucal, African Thrush and White-chinned Prinia are also resident.

The Sabaringo Valley

This can be accessed easily along the road between the back of Kichwa Tembo Camp and the Sabaringo Ford.

The thick evergreen scrub that lines the creek along its lower reaches widens into dense forest further up. This provides a home to species not previously thought to inhabit the area, such as Crested Guineafowl, Thick-billed Honeyguide, Lühder's Bush Shrike, Joyful and Little Greenbuls, Red-capped Robin Chat, Grey-winged Ground Robin and Brown-capped Weaver. Others, such as Grey-throated Barbet and White-headed Woodhoopoe, occasionally range down as far as Kichwa Tembo camp. The valley also hosts an isolated population of Little Purple-banded Sunbird, while the miombo-like slopes have such exciting species as Red-tailed Chat, Yellow-bellied Hyliota and Green-capped Eremomela. Another rare resident, Ovampo Sparrow-hawk, is best looked for in the valley in the early morning. Grey-crested Helmet Shrikes are nomadic but not infrequent. On some mornings Trilling Cisticolas seem to call from all over the valley, and Tabora Cisticolas are quite common on the lightly-wooded slopes.

Kichwa Tembo camp

The camp includes an extensive area of forest enclosed in an electric fence, and thus safe from the ravages of elephants and buffalo that have destroyed so much of the area's original forest, especially along the Mara River.

A nature trail follows the perimeter of the fence, winding through the forest, and is ideal for birding. Resident species include Ross's and Schalow's Turacos, Little Spotted and Golden-tailed Woodpeckers, Narina's Trogon, Double-toothed Barbet, Blue and Ashy Flycatchers, Wattle-eye, Fan-tailed Warbler and the very secretive Green-backed Twinspot.

Kichwa boasts over 400 species, recorded from the camp or overflying, and has been a refuge for White-backed Night Herons in three different years.

The slopes of the Oloololo Escarpment

These boulder-strewn slopes, seasonally covered by grass then laid bare by fire, are immediately west of the road from Mara River to Oloololo Gate. Rock-loving Cisticolas inhabit boulder lines in several locations, and Red-tailed Chats and Long-billed Pipits are both common.

Kichwa-Little Governor's plain

This is the area in front of Kichwa Tembo camp, bordered to the South by Sabaringo Creek, to the North and West by the main road, and to the East by the

Double-toothed Barbet — *Edwin Selempo*

Mara River. These extensive grassy, black cotton soil plains have only a very occasional Balanites tree standing like a lone sentinel, often topped by a bird of prey. When the grass is high after the rains, no fewer than five species of widowbirds breed here: Red-naped, Jackson's, Yellow-mantled, White-winged and Fan-tailed. Pectoral-patch and Zitting Cisticolas give their aerial displays and Rufous-naped Larks sing from the termite mounds, competing with the Sooty Chats and Usambiro Barbets that like to breed in them. Rosy-breasted Longclaws display over the densest grass patches before disappearing into the vegetation; Yellow-throated Longclaws are much easier to see.

During dry periods, the grass is devoured by grazing mammals and the plains provide a home for Crowned Plovers, Temminck's Coursers and numerous Plain-backed Pipits.

The Sabaringo Creek spills out over the lower plains without reaching the Mara River. As the water drops in this seasonal swamp, large numbers of storks and herons gather for a feast of frogs. Shorebirds are numerous. In April,

Schalow's Turaco — *Edwin Selempo*

Corncrakes, African Crakes and Spotted Crakes are common, but only readily seen from a hot-air balloon!

The Mara River

The once dense, evergreen forest has largely been destroyed by elephants, and it is now open and susceptible to fires.

On the river itself there are few residents, apart from Egyptian Geese and Water Thicknees. However, numerous kingfishers and swallows frequent its banks, and at times herons and storks are numerous.

The swamp at Little Governor's can be productive, with species such as Purple Gallinule and Lesser Moorhen from time to time. Goliath and Purple Herons are regular. Around the camp, Ross's and Schalow's Turacos are common, and Little Spotted Woodpecker and Narina's Trogon resident. A pair of Pel's Fishing Owls live further down river, on an inaccessible bend: they are only visible from a hot-air balloon.

The Eastern Mara

Scrub between the Narok Road and Siana Springs junctions

After turning off the Narok-Lemek road onto the Keekorok road, there is a great expanse of dry, dusty, overgrazed scrubland. This area is little explored and could harbour interesting birds. Yellow-necked Spurfowl and Taita Fiscal, not found elsewhere in the Mara region, are resident. Two-banded Coursers are often seen, and this is one of the best places in the Mara to see Kori Bustards.

Siana Springs area
This can be further divided into three distinct areas.

The plains along the entrance road
These extensive grassy plains support Temminck's Coursers as well as Red-capped Larks, pipits and migrant wheatears.

The scrub-sided valleys near Siana Springs
Just south of the camp entrance is a valley that is very rich in birds. Many species are not found elsewhere in the Mara; indeed, this is the only Kenya locality for Magpie Shrike. Resident species include such rarities as Grey-crested Helmet Shrike, Pale Wren Warbler, Tabora Cisticola and the distinctive chestnut-bellied race (sharpei) of the African Penduline Tit.

Small numbers of Little Tawny Pipit occur from November to January and may possibly breed. Rare migrants include Common Redstart Pho*enecurus phoenicurus*, Semi-collared Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca* and Wood Warbler. This may also be the only regular wintering site in Kenya for Icterine Warblers, which occur in small numbers, always in *Acacia* trees.

Siana Springs Camp
Siana is easily located by following the signposts from the Narok-Keekorok road. A large open area of grassland with *Acacias*, enclosed by an electric fence, includes two winding permanent streams, a small deep pond, and a shallow marshy area with thick vegetation. The creekside vegetation is dense and scrubby.

This variety of habitats makes Siana a good birding area. Specialities include Red-necked Spurfowl, African Scops Owl, Bare-faced Go-away Bird and Swahili Sparrow. There is a small, isolated population of Little Weavers. Unusual visitors have included a pair of Red-headed Bluebills, present for over twelve months, Abyssinian Hill Babbler and Golden-winged Sunbird.

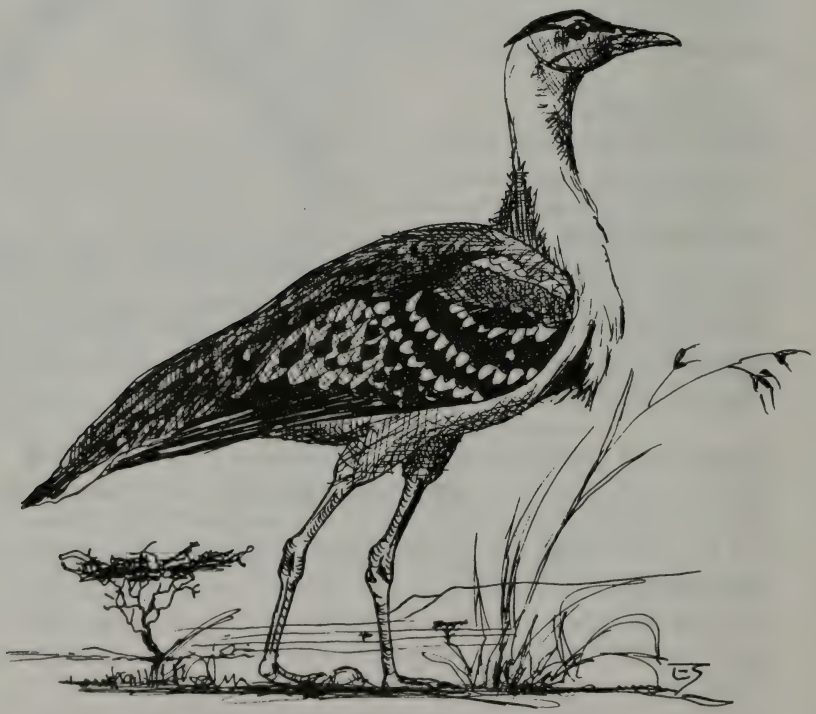
Grassy plains and Cro*ton* thicket from Sekenani Gate to Keekorok
This extensive area is excellent for large mammals, but has few unusual birds. There are many raptors, however, and it is a good area to find Ground Hornbills. The hill valleys to the East are unexplored and should harbour species similar to Siana Springs.

The Central Mara

This covers the large area east of the Mara River, bordered by Mara River Camp, Mara Safari Club, Mara Buffalo and Fig Tree Camp south to the Mara River Bridge-Keekorok road. It can be divided roughly into four sections.

Musiara thornscrub

This Acacia thicket occupies an area from near Mara River Camp to Musiara Gate, extending to Leopard Gorge. With increasing settlement the habitat has become degraded, but is still rich in birds. These include White-bellied Bustard, Abyssinian Scimitarbill, Red-throated Tit, Silverbird and Banded Parisoma. The termite mounds and culverts occasionally support Rufous-chested Swallows, which are probably more frequent here than anywhere else in the Mara.



Denham's Bustard — *Edwin Selempo*

Northern plains
Extensive short-grass, seasonally inundated plains occupy the region from Mara River airstrip east to near Mara Safari Club and south to Mara Buffalo Camp.

These frequently impassable plains are constantly kept short by grazing mammals, unlike others in the Mara. From July onwards they harbour large numbers of Caspian Plovers. Temminck's Coursers are resident, and White and Abdim's Storks (in ever-decreasing numbers) frequent the area during the long rains. A pair of Denham's Bustards is resident near the Mara Safari Club.

Fig Tree plains
These extensive grassy plains extend from Fig Tree Gate to the Mara River bridge-Keekorok road. In the West they adjoin the Musiara/Paradise plains. Yellow-throated Sandgrouse are resident, and there are numbers of Black-bellied Bustards. The sea of grass is attractive to harriers and other raptors, and Desert Cisticolas appear when the grass is short.

Musiara/Paradise plains
These extend between the north and south Mara bridges, east of the river and west of Fig Tree plains. They resemble the Fig Tree plains but are lower-lying; the grass is often tall and dense with many seasonal swamps, one of which is large and almost permanent. The convoluted windings of the Mara River have resulted in many ox-bows, which also become seasonal swamps.

Musiara Swamp
This large seasonal swamp usually has a little water even at the start of the dry season. Fairly extensive reedbeds provide a refuge for skulking species, including Little Bitterns, African Water Rails and a small resident breeding population of Rufous-bellied Herons. The more open swampy areas often throng with water birds, including Saddle-billed Storks, ibises and herons. Migrant duck and waders can occur in large numbers when conditions are right. In recent years up to four Green-winged Teal *Anas crecca* have taken up residence from December to early March. Less common waders include Temminck's Stint, up to 17 recorded at one time.

Vagrants have included Black-winged Pratincole and, most recent and exciting, Kenya's first Shoebill (the original record from many years ago is now known to be a hoax).

Spur-winged Plovers, continuing their undocumented spread, have now been present for over a year. May to September sees a few Madagascar Squacco Herons joining the Squacco and Rufous-bellied Herons. Wattled Plovers are present and noisy all year. This is a birding site not to be missed.

Governor's Camp and riverine forest
The forest holds many species, largely shared by Little Governor's and Kichwa Tembo. It is rich in raptors and when trees are fruiting attracts large numbers of Olive Pigeons and smaller gatherings of Black and White Casqued Hornbills.

Musiara grasslands
These cover the rest of the area. The tall grass provides a refuge for Rosy-breasted Longclaws, Northern White-tailed Bush Larks, Pectoral-patch Cisticolas and Quailfinches. None of these interesting birds is particularly easy to see.

South of Governor's Camp the plains are bisected by numerous seasonal creeks and, closer to the river, swampy ox-bows. This area undoubtedly holds many interesting birds but is not accessible by vehicle.

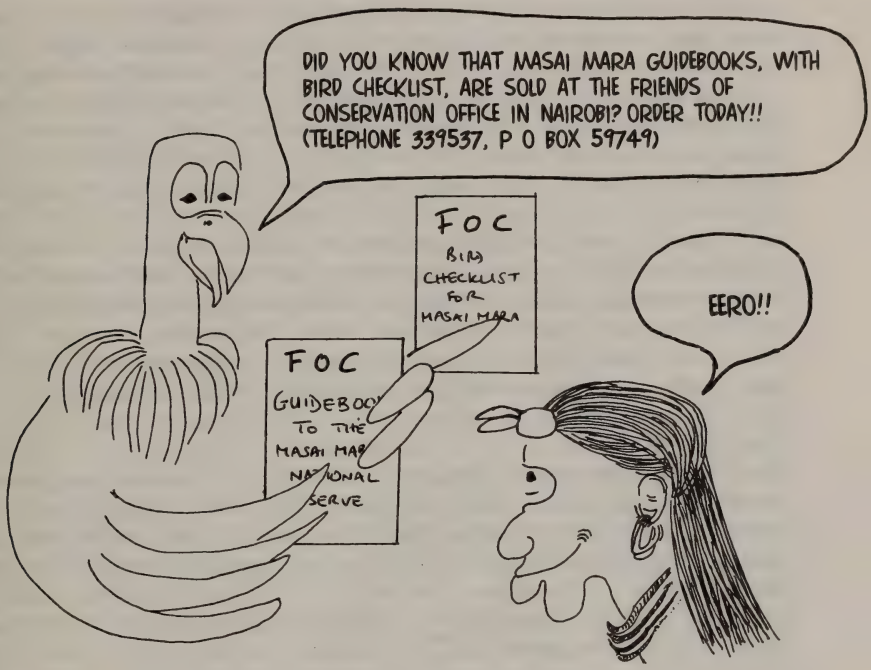
The south-western Mara

This incorporates the area bordered by the Oloolo Gate-Keekorok road to the West and the Mara River to the East, and extends from south of Sabaringo Swamp to the southern Mara River bridge.

The extensive grasslands hold similar birds to other such habitats in the Mara, but the swampier depressions support small numbers of Black Coucals. In March and April, skulking crakes are joined by hordes of Harlequin Quail and, sometimes, Blue Quail. There are many inaccessible ox-bows along the river, but two are readily explored (although dry for much of the year). When wet, these swamps may attract scarce species such as Dwarf Bittern or Painted Snipe, and regularly hold Spur-winged Goose and Knob-billed Duck.

Acknowledgements

In the Mara, I would like to thank Mrs Jorie Butler Kent for providing most generous accommodation at Kichwa Tembo Camp, and for companionship on numerous forays into the field. Thanks to the management and staff of Kichwa Tembo for making me feel comfortable and welcome, and to the drivers for reporting their sightings with such enthusiasm. I would also like to thank Mark Lissimore and Mara Balloon Safaris for enabling aerial access to find some of the more difficult species along the Mara River. To all my other friends in the Mara not named personally, thank you.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Onesmas Kahindi

Records and Notes

This section exists for the rapid publication of interesting observations, and contributions are welcomed. If you are sending in records for **Kenya Birds,** please consider the following guidelines. For **breeding records,** send in cases of **confirmed** breeding, i.e. birds incubating eggs or feeding nestlings/fledglings. Records of confirmed breeding are useful for ALL species; records of nest-building, courtship etc. are only needed for rare species or ones where there are few breeding records. If possible please fill in a nes**t-record card** at the same time. Much more detail can be recorded on a card, which is of permanent value. Cards can be obtained free of charge from the EANHS Nest Record Scheme Organiser (see inside back page). A report listing records submitted to the scheme is published every two years in the Annual Bird Report of Scopus.

For other records of **Afrotropical/oceanic** birds and **Palaearctic** birds, please send in any sightings and notes that you think are of interest. The Editors will select records for publication according to the space available. For **all** records, including breeding records, please be as precise as possible about **dates** and **location.** If you have sightings from places not easily found on the map, give the latitude and longitude with as much precision as you can (preferably to the nearest second of arc). This will allow us to use these records in the Ornithology Department's computerised database of bird distributions.

Supporting details are always welcome for unusual records and will improve the chances of publication. Records of certain species are requested for inclusion in the Scopus Annual Bird Report (the third issue of Scopus each year). These should be sent to Don Turner (P O Box 48019, Nairobi). who can also supply information on which records are required. For very unusual sightings, supporting details (i.e. field notes, photographs etc.) will be needed for scrutiny by the OS-C Rarities Committee.

Key to records

New atlas square records are indicated in square brackets. Codes are: **pres**, present (first record); **post pres**, present (first post-1970 record); **prob**, probable breeding; **conf**, confirmed breeding; **post conf**, confirmed breeding (first since 1970). For example, **[pres, conf 25B]** indicates that the species is present and confirmed as breeding in square 25B.

Where scientific names are not stated here (and elsewhere in *Kenya Birds*) the English names follow Britton (ed.) 1980, *Birds of East Africa*.

Breeding records

Little Grebe: Three young swimming with an adult, Langata, Nairobi 13/7/94 WMBw. **Egyptian Goose [conf 91A]:** Twelve ducklings, Dhanisa 16/7/92 ON & KN. **Marabou**: Two nestlings, Hyena Dam, Nairobi National Park 13/11/94 FN. **Secretary Bird**: Adult with chick, Nairobi NP 2/8/94 RM & YMC. **Great Sparrowhawk**: Nest of twigs and branches used fourth year in a row; two chicks being fed by adult, City Park, Nairobi 19/10/94 WMBw. **Fish Eagle [Conf 91D]**: Both adults feeding two young, dull brown with black and white spots on breast and tail, Kipini 20/7/92 ON & KN. **Martial Eagle**: Two adults with chick, Nairobi NP 2/8/94 RM & YMC. **Black Kite**: Adult incubating, Nyandiwa, Oyugis 27/11/94 JOO. **Crowned Crane**: Two young, one-third adult size, Hyena Dam, Nairobi National Park 7/8/94 DB. **Purple Gallinule**: One half-grown young with adults, Hyena Dam, Nairobi National Park 8/5/94 AH, JH, MV. **Kori Bustard**: Adult with one young, Nairobi NP 6/7/94 KW. **Crowned Plover**: Three downy young with parents, Hippo Pools, Nairobi National Park 29/5/94 FN. **Spur-winged Plover [Conf 91A]**: Four eggs in shallow mud nest, L. Shakababo 24/7/92 ON & KN. **Didric Cuckoo**: Juvenile being fed by two Reichenow's Weavers, Eldoret Golf Club 20/8/94 DB, IA. **African Wood Owl**: Young perched next to adult, City Park, Nairobi 19/10/4 WMBw. **Little Swift**: Several nestlings calling from nests under a roof, Mt. Elgon Lodge, Mt. Elgon 12/12/94 PGG & JOO. **Spotted Eagle Owl**: Adult with

one juvenile, Upper Hill, Nairobi, 5/94 IL. **Speckled Mousebird [conf 91D]**: Two large nestlings, Kipini Hospital 3/1/93 ON & KN. **Malachite Kingfisher:** Adult feeding fledgling, Tigoni 2/5/94 SD. **Red-fronted Barbet**: Two juveniles fed by both adults, Lukenya Hills 20/11/94 FN. **White-headed Barbet**: Two nestlings poking heads through a hole in a tree, Nairobi Arboretum 5/10/94 WMBw. **Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird**: Adult feeding young, Tigoni 29/4-3/5/94 SD. **African Rock Martin**: Adult sitting on nest, Tigoni 1/5/94 SD. **Black-lored Babbler:** Nest with two eggs, Naivasha 18/10/94 JW. **Yellow-whiskered Greenbul**: Young fledged, Miotoni, Karen 16/9/94 GRC-vS. **Common Bulbul**: Parent accompanied by juvenile, Miotoni, Karen 1/3/94 GRC-vS. **White-starred Forest Robin**: Juvenile ringed, Miotoni, Karen 7/2/94 GRC-vS. **Northern Olive Thrush**: Parent feeding young, Miotoni, Karen 9/1/94 GRC-VS. **White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher**: Juvenile fed by adult, Iriaini, Ndaragwa 13/11/94. LL & KN. **Black-throated Wattle-eye**: One juvenile fed by two adults, Iriaini, Ndargwa 12/11/94 NG; **[prob 114B]** Adults accompanied by immature male, 22/11/94 KB ('birds resident in nearby coastal forest'). **Paradise Flycatcher [conf 91A]:** Two fledglings fed by adult female, Samikaro 18/6/92 ON & KN; **[conf 89C]:** Bird incubating, Ngulia Lodge, Tsavo West 4/12/94 CJ, JOO, PN, OM. **Mountain Wagtail**: Nest on a rocky cliff, Nakuru National Park 14/8/94 JH. **Wattled Starling**: Carrying nesting material and displaying, Nairobi National Park 15/5/94 FN. **Collared Sunbird [post conf 91A]**: Two fledglings, Samikaro 18/3/92 ON & KN. **Bronze Sunbird**: Adult male feeding nestlings, Tigoni 8/8/94 SD. **Northern Double-collared Sunbird:** Nest of fine strands of fibre, Miotoni, Karen 8/3/94 GRC-vS. **Tacazze Sunbird [conf 75B]**: Adults feeding fledgling, Tigoni 5/8/94 SD. **Yellow White-eye**: Young begging, Langata, Nairobi 13/7/94 WMBw. **Black-headed Weaver**: Several nests being built, Ngulia Lodge, Tsavo West 2-6/12/94 JOO. **Baglafecht Weaver**: Juvenile being fed by both parents, Miotoni, Karen 2/6/94 GRC-vS. **Masked Weaver**: Active colony, with two nestlings fed by adult at one nest, Bungoma 7/8/94 JG; **[pres, conf 60D]**: Several nests with males displaying, Nyandiwa, Oyugis 27/11/94 JOO. **Speke's Weaver**: Males building, singing and displaying, Carnivore, Nairobi 4/94 FN; Single male weaving a nest, North Kinangop 31/10/94 PGG, CJ, LL, JOO. **Golden Weaver [conf 91D]**: Juvenile begging food from male and female adults, Kipini Airstrip 27/7/92 ON & KN. **House Sparrow [conf 103A]**: Female feeding two juveniles, Malindi town 16/7/92 ON & KN. **Rufous Sparrow**: Two fledglings, Magadi Road, Nairobi 13/7/94 WMBw. **Bronze Mannikin**: Juvenile fed by adult, Langata, Nairobi 6/7/94 WMBw. **Yellow-rumped Seed-eater**: Pair feeding two juveniles, Langata, Nairobi 20/7/94 WMBw. **African Citril**: Juvenile fed by adult, Carnivore, Nairobi 20/7/94 JG.

Other records: Afrotropical species

Audubon's Shearwater: One 10 km off-shore, Malindi 11/12/94 LL. **Wedge-tailed Shearwater**: Two 10 km off-shore, Malindi 11/12/94 LL. **White Pelican [pres 114B]:** Bamburi, Mombasa 8/94 YSES. **Night Heron [pres 114B]:** Bamburi, Mombasa 8/94 YSES. **Lammergeyer [pres 26D]:** Two immatures soaring low near Lake Logipi 12/8/94 YSES. **Cuckoo Hawk**: In garden, Nairobi Hill, Nairobi 22/5/94 FN. **Ayres' Hawk**

Eagle: Juvenile flying low and calling continuously, Kapsabet 23/11/94 JOO. **Common Noddy**: Immature resting Malindi Beach 9/12/94 LL; ten 1 km offshore Malindi 11/12/94 LL. **Gull-billed Tern [pres 26D]:** 500 feeding on Lake Logipi 11/8/94 YSES. **Olive Pigeon [post pres 49D]:** Many feeding on *Apodytes dimidiata* fruits, Sirwa, near Eldama Ravine 7-8/94 PM. **White-bellied Go-away Bird [pres 114C]**: Wasini Island, 24/11/93–10/7/94 KB & BB (see article below). **Silvery-cheeked Hornbill**: Pair of adults displaying, Upper Hill, Nairobi 18/7/94 YM-C. **Fischer's Sparrow Lark [post pres 26D]:** Ten near Lake Logipi 11/8/94 YSES. **Bare-eyed Thrush**: Adult in breeding plumage, Lukenya 14/8/94 PLP & YM-C ('the first observation in many years of visiting'). **Crested Flycatcher**: Female, seen 11/8/94, then 10–14/9/94, Langata, Nairobi. PF & MF. **Taita Fiscal [pres 50A]:** Observed at Tungulbei, Baringo 29/10/94 CJ. **Red-winged Starling**: Two large flocks, Ngong Hills 12/7/94 YM-C.

Other records: Palaearctic species

Black Stork: Single birds overflying Masai Mara (with Steppe Eagles and Steppe Buzzards) 21/10/94, Olorgesailie [**post pres 75C**] 26/11/94, National Museums, Nairobi, 20/12/94; three overflying Hell's Gate 30/10/94; one Nairobi NP 17/12/94 LL. **Lesser Spotted Eagle**: One adult Tigoni 29/10/94 LL; one at Hopcraft's, Athi Plains, 19/11/94 LL & CJ. **Greater Spotted Eagle**: Two immatures near Nakuru town 27/12/94 LL. **Long-legged Buzzard**: One, Ngulia 4/12/94 LL & CJ. **Booted Eagle**: Dark morphs at Lake Magadi 20/11/94 LL & CJ and Hell's Gate 1/1/94 LL. **Eastern Red-footed Falcon**: At Hopcraft's, Athi Plains, eight 19/11/94 LL & CJ, 11 on 21/11/94 LL, one 22/11/94 LL & CJ; one Mpala Ranch, Laikipia 24/11/94, six Olorgesailie 26/11/94, four Tsavo West 6/12/94 LL. **Sooty Falcon**: Immature Hopcraft's, Athi Plains 6/11/94 LL & CJ. **Eleonora's Falcon**: 11 Lukenya, Athi Plains 6/11/94, one Hopcraft's, Athi Plains 21/11/94 LL & CJ; one Mpala Ranch, Laikipia 23/11/94, one Tsavo West 4/12/94 LL. **Little Ringed Plover**: Two, Sabaki River Mouth 12/12/94 LL. **Broad-billed Sandpiper**: Nine, Sabaki River Mouth 12/12/94 LL. **Willow Warbler**: One ringed, Museum grounds, Nairobi 1/10/94 NbiRG. **Icterine Warbler [post pres 75B]**: One, Museum grounds, Nairobi 15/11/94 LL (record to be submitted to EANHS OS-c Rarities Committee). **Olivaceous Warbler** and **River Warbler**: One of each ringed at Hopcraft's, Athi Plains, 22/11/94 LL & CJ.

Contributors

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A solitary White-bellied Go-away Bird on Wasini Island, Shimoni

On 24 November 1993, somewhat to our surprise, we recorded a solitary White-bellied Go-away Bird, a species most often found in dry thornbush country, on Wasini Island, near Shimoni on the south coast of Kenya. The distribution map in *A Bird Atlas of Kenya* (Lewis and Pomeroy) indicates the species is absent from 'our' South Coast Quarter Square Degrees (QSD 114A, B and C).

At the time of writing (10 July 1994) the bird has been present on Wasini Island for over six months, is regularly seen, and has become increasingly used to human company. There is no doubt that it is a vagrant or stray out of its normal habitat, and one which would have wandered no great distance. The nearest presence shown in the bird atlas is approximately 50–75 km away (QSD 1D2C and 113 B, respectively), and the nearest breeding area about 90 kilometres away (QSD 101D).

The bird is obviously thriving, and has done so through an exceptionally dry hot season (November to March) and an exceptionally wet season to date (especially May). So what is it eating? *Birds of Africa* (Vol. 2) tells us the diet is "fruit and flowers of Acacia: green pods of *Acacia tortilis*". Praed and Grant (*Birds of Eastern and North Eastern Africa*, Vol. 1) say, more broadly, "fruits and berries". There are many species of sequentially fruiting trees and shrubs on Wasini Island, but probably very few, if any, of these occur in the dry thornbush of the hinterland.

We tentatively assume that White-bellied Go-away Birds adapt readily both to new surroundings and unfamiliar food species. This raises the question why this particular species has not expanded its range to areas of the coastal strip which are ecologically similar to Wasini Island. — *Ken & Betty Bock, P O Box 641, Ukunda.*

Drongo... aggressor and killer

In the past, I have witnessed on a number of occasions the aggressiveness displayed by Drongos. The aggression has always been directed to birds of prey or competitors for food resources. This time it was directed to a male Peters' Twinspot.

On 24 July 1994, in a mist-netting session at Diani Forest, Kwale District, a Peters' Twinspot caught in the net was savagely attacked by a Drongo. In a flash of a second the Twinspot had the skin covering its skull ripped off. This led to its death shortly due to excessive bleeding. The specimen was collected and handed over to the National Museums' Osteology Department. —*Kuria Ndung'u, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

Black-tailed Godwit breeding in Kenya?

The Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* is a Palaearctic migrant. These migrants breed in Europe during the northern summer. In the winter they come to tropical countries to avoid the bad weather conditions and feed. Usually only the fully independent birds migrate.

The Black-tailed Godwit can easily be identified in the field by its long, straight orange bill with dark tip, broad white wingbars and white tail base above the black tail. It is considerably larger than a Spotted Redshank. The winter plumage in both sexes is generally grey-brown above and pale below. The juvenile is buff on the neck and breast.

It was at about 16:00 h on 29 January 1994, during the waterbird census on Lake Oloidien, Naivasha. The weather was hot and humid, with rain clouds gathering in the sky. About 20 m away from the count team (consisting of Jennifer Oduori, Nathan Gichuki, Inga Ayres and George Amutete) a strange episode occurred. One Black-tailed Godwit was seen feeding another, presumably a young bird. "It's unbelievable!" the counters exclaimed in turns as they gazed at the unfolding drama. The presumed parent several times skimmed its beak through the muddy water and each time placed the food in the opened beak of a more-than-ready young bird. The young bird resembled the parent but had more buff on the breast and the neck. After each load it seemed to pester the parent, apparently trying to show it clearly that it was in need of more food. As it was fed, the young bird kept shaking its body, especially the wings. It seemed to make no effort to feed itself. Limosa l*imosa* has never been known to breed in Kenya: has anyone else ever made a similar observation? — *George Amutete, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

Indian House Crow control in Malindi and Watamu

The House Crow established itself in Malindi in the late 1970s. The population rapidly increased and by 1988 numbered several thousand. Numbers of indigenous bird species noticeably declined due to other presence and hoteliers and Malindi residents complained of the nuisance value and noise of the pest.

In November 1988 I initiated a programme to control the House Crow. On 21 November 1988 a meeting of all Malindi and Watamu hoteliers and tour operators was called and convened under the chairmanship of Harry Wanderi to discuss the House Crow problem. It was decided to form a special Indian House Crow Committee under the chairmanship of Bruce Buchland. He also undertook to establish and register the Malindi/Watamu Crow Fund and together with Elly Esposito launch a fund-raising exercise to finance the programme.

For the past five-and-a-half years the project has been funded by donations from the hotels, many private individuals and during 1990, when tourism was on a marked decline, by Friends of Conservation who kept the programme going with monthly donations of KSh 4,350/= for over a year. The most recent major donation was that of two new bicycles to replace the five-year-old four which were virtually collapsing — these came from the Netherlands Government through their conservation representative in August 1994.

Initially the programme operated using four traps in Malindi and two in Watamu, where John Harvey oversaw their operation. In Malindi the traps were overseen by Kadenge Imbaye and Changawa Chanjalo. Lately most of the control is being done using a safe poison, and much of the success of the operation has been due to the hard work and skill of these two men. I have made periodic visits to Malindi and Watamu to co-ordinate the project while Bruce Buchland handled its administration and together with Elly Esposito continued to raise the necessary funds.

Throughout the programme a reward has been available through the office of what is now the Kenya Wildlife Service for the collection of House Crow chicks and eggs. The public and in particular children responded well to the scheme, advertised by coloured posters, whereby KSh. 2/- and KSh. 5/- were paid for an egg or chick respectively.

The success of the programme is now very evident. Nearly 7,000 House Crows have been destroyed and both Malindi and Watamu are virtually free of the

Indian House Crow — *Martin Woodcock*

pest. As a result indigenous birds are returning in numbers despite increased destruction of natural habitats for 'development'. Hotels are no longer troubled and it is pleasing that many of these establishments have improved their methods of garbage disposal. Dick Mugaga of the Department of Public Health has had much to do with this and has greatly assisted with the House Crow programme, of which he is a committee member.

Despite the favourable results it is no time to be complacent. Unless pressure is kept up on the House Crow they will come in from elsewhere and could re-establish themselves. In order to prevent this happening the programme must be ongoing. — *Tony Archer, P O Box 15676, Nairobi.*

Birding records from Kericho District in early 1994

As in many parts of Kenya, the weather patterns in the Kericho/Bomet/Sotik area in the latter months of 1993 and the early months of 1994 were distinctly unusual, with a prolonged period of drought. This coincided with some unusual bird records.

From late December through to April there was a rash of sightings of Levaillant's Cuckoo across the entire district. Both the area and the time are unusual for this species. The Red-chested Cuckoo is commonly heard in the west and central parts of the district in all months, but rare in the eastern sector; through these early months of 1994, however, there were several records — both sight and sound — from all over the East of the district. Early 1994 also produced an extraordinary number of records of Didric and Emerald Cuckoo, and a profusion of Ross's Turaco: this bird is recorded for the area but never in such numbers — the common species being Hartlaub's Turaco.

Some of these sightings might be attributed to the fact that so many of the indigenous trees, normally evergreen, lost their leaves during the five months of drought. Apart from anything else, this made birds much more visible. An old multi-species fig tree at the edge of my front lawn also lost its leaves but had abundant fruit; however, the usually intense activity of fruit-eating and insectivorous birds, and monkeys, was entirely lacking between December and April.

On the evening of 19 January 1994 a single immature Yellow-billed Stork was recorded on Chagaik Dam in eastern Kericho, the first for this area. On the evening of 21 February 1994 more than 100 European Storks roosted in the tea just west of Kericho town. On 19 February 1994 over 50 Abdim's Storks foraged in and around the tea and along the hydro furrow during the early afternoon on Chebown Estate west of Kericho town. On 20 February 1994 there were sightings

by three knowledgeable birders of five Madagascar Bee-eaters at Ngoina, Kipsonoi River — near Ikonge, Sotik/Kericho boundary. All these species have been recorded in this atlas square in the past, but are certainly unusual.

The migratory movements of the European Bee-eaters also appeared to have been disrupted. In most years this species leaves towards the end of April or beginning of May, and many individuals over-winter across the entire district. By 28 March 1994, however, they were all gone, and on 2 April 1994 I had confirmed that there were none to be seen or heard anywhere in the district. It was with some surprise that I and others then recorded, across the district, large flocks of European Bee-eaters on the 7/8 April 1994. By 10/11 April 1994 they had gone. This may have been a stop-over for birds coming up from further south, but this phenomenon has not been noted in this area before. The European Swallows left the district on 31 March 1994, also earlier than in previous years, re-appearing en-masse over the whole district on 10 August 1994.

During February, March and April my shower bird bath in the garden (Chagaik Estate East Kericho) was in more than usual demand and yielded some surprising records. Unusual visitors to the bath (though common in the garden) were Speckled and Green Pigeons. A pair of Dusky Turtle Doves, very rarely seen, also visited the bath on 22 April 1994. On the same day the bath, adjacent bird table and bush were taken over for some 15 minutes by a happy little mixed flock of Fawn-breasted and Black-crowned Waxbills. There were around 36 birds, with many young of both species being fed and helped in preening after their baths. This is the first time I have seen the adults of one species feeding and assisting the young of another species in a mixed bird party. The same two species have repeated similar performances since in my garden.

— Kimbo *(A.J.) Beakbane, P O Box 20, Kericho.*

Another Sokoke Scops Owl caught in the Usambara Mountains, Tanzania

Six globally threatened bird species are found in the foothill forests of the East Usambara Mountains, Tanzania. This is remarkably high in comparison to other African forests. In August 1992, a Cambridge-Tanzania Rainforest Project conducted a biological survey here. One of their most surprising discoveries was a small owl assumed to be the Sokoke Scops Owl *Otus ireneae*, a species only discovered in 1965 in the Arabuko-Sokoke forest, Kenya, and thought to occur nowhere else. It now seems as though a significant population of Sokoke Scops Owls may exist in these scattered foothill forests. This in turn has led to speculation that the Sokoke Scops Owl may once have ranged throughout suitable habitat along the East African coast.

On 30 November 1994, Simon Thomsett, David Ngala and I travelled to the eastern foothills of the Usambaras. Our mission was to determine whether the 'scops owl' caught in 1992 was indeed the same species as the Sokoke Scops Owl. With assistance and support from Tom Evans, a scientific officer with Frontier Tanzania, we managed to track down one owl in the Manga Forest Reserve. Our first glimpse of the owl was enchanting. We heard it respond to our imitated calls and followed it along a small path which led deep into the heart of the forest. Stalking the owl at night in dense forest on a steep slope was tiring work but nevertheless quite exhilarating. It was finally David who pointed out the owl. Unlike in Arabuko-Sokoke, it was perched quite high (about 12 m as opposed to 4 m). We recorded its call, which sounded exactly the same as that of its counterparts in Arabuko-Sokoke. The owl was tawny in colour with a chocolate-brown collar. It appeared identical to similarly-coloured birds found in Arabuko-Sokoke.

We set our camp at the base of Manga hill and trekked everyday up the hill to put up mist nets close to the owl's roost. Manga is a small patch of lowland forest covering an area of about 10 km2. It lies on a hill approximately 25 km south east of Kambai Forest Reserve, where Tom Evans and his group caught the first Sokoke Scops Owl. The forest in Manga is slightly different from that of the Cynometra woodland of Arabuko-Sokoke where the owl is mainly found. The trees in Manga are much taller (canopy height about 25 m as compared to 12 m in Arabuko-Sokoke) but the undergrowth looks remarkably similar with dense entanglements of vines and small shrubs. Among the trees we could only identify *Manilkara sansibarensis* which also occurs in Arabuko-Sokoke.

It took us five nights of tracking, stalking and calling before we finally caught our owl (nicknamed Amani). Amani was tiny, standing at only 14.5 cm. He possessed a characteristic pale 'V' pattern from his ear tufts to the top of his bill. His eyes were dull mustard-yellow while his feet were a translucent buff colour. Amani called constantly in response to our imitations, and on the basis of this (plus his morphology), we suspected that he was an immature male trying to establish territorial rights. Amani also roosted alone, unlike the cosy pairs we were used to seeing in Arabuko-Sokoke. We took blood samples which we hope will be compared with those of the owls of Arabuko-Sokoke, to determine the genetic distance of this individual from birds further north.

Tom Evans and his group are in the near future going to explore the little-known lowland forests of the north-eastern Usambaras in the hope of finding more Sokoke Scops Owls. The owls have already been heard in other small lowland forests of the Usambaras like Kwangumi and Segoma. It is quite likely that they may also be present in the remote forests north of Arabuko-Sokoke,

close to the Somali border. The insecurity of this area however prevents any expeditions in search of this endangered bird. — Mun*ir Virani, P O Box 45111, Nairobi.*

The storm and its aftermath

On 14 May 1994 the most incredible storm hit our garden, situated on a hill top in Chagaik Estate, Kericho. By mid-day the rumblings had reached a crescendo of head-splitting proportions and it was as dark as late dusk, lit only by the pyrotechnics of the lightning. Three separate storms hit us simultaneously: a hail storm from the North, a second hail storm off the Mau to the South-east and torrential rain coming from the West. Approximately an inch of rain was recorded in fifteen minutes. The resulting whirlwind drove the hail stones like bullets in all directions with enormous force. A 'direct hit' on a Lesser Striped Swallow's nest, tucked up under the eves of the double-storey roof, tore out the bottom of the nest and deposited three eggs on to the windowsill and roof below. The actual storm lasted for an electrifying 20–25 minutes, but left a trail of devastation in its wake. The lawns and flower beds were ankle deep in water, melting hail stones, leaves, branches and felled trees.

By 15:00 h most of the surface water had drained away and I was drawn to my office window on the second floor by a plethora of bird calls and movement. The front lawn (some 30 m × 15 m) was... simply covered with birds.

Pulling myself together I counted 19 different species, all squabbling away, dashing, flitting and fluttering about, and feeding an inordinate number of supplicating young. Using a manual sheep counter, I recorded >20 Common Bulbuls, >40 Baglafecht Weavers, 5 Blue Flycatchers, 7 White-eyed Slaty Flycatchers, 7 Wells' Wagtail, 8 African Pied Wagtail, 3 Mountain Wagtail, >25 Grey-headed Sparrows, >18 Northern Olive Thrush, 3 Snowy-headed Robin Chats, 5 Robin Chats, 11 Grey-capped Warblers, 10 Streaky Seed-eaters, 7 African Citrils and 3 Blue-headed Coucals. Black Rough-wings, Lesser Striped Swallows, Red-rumped Swallows and White-rumped Swifts added to the rumpus as they swooped in low around the lawn.

From my vantage point I could not make out what the birds were feeding on or what the 'fuss' was all about. There were no signs of a termite hatch and no midges in evidence. Finally I crept downstairs and around the back of the house to discover that the lawn was covered with minuscule black grasshoppers, approximately 0.5 mm in length. I could only surmise that perhaps these grasshoppers had been maturing in galleries under the turf of the lawn and had been flushed out by the storm, providing a tremendous feast for the birds... It certainly was an a*mazing* sight. — *Kimbo (A.J.) Beakbane, P O Box 20, Kericho.*

Eavesdropping: Shoebill in the Masai Mara

On 8 October 1994, while we waited for dinner at Kichwa Tembo camp, Mr Njomo, a driver from Micato Tours, was trying unsuccessfully to convince several colleagues at his table that he had seen a Shoebill or Whale-headed Stork. The story sounded incredible to me as well — I knew the bird was found in some wetlands of Tanzania and Uganda, but never in Kenya.

Njomo apparently first saw the bird while on a game drive a week earlier, in the small marshes next to Mara Serena Lodge. He did not take much notice, although it was a bird that was new to him. He then saw it again in Musiara Swamp, and this time consulted his field guide. He became convinced that it was really a Shoebill. The following day, I called on Willis Oketch, the resident ornithologist at Mara River camp. He confirmed Njomo's story: it was a Shoebill and he had actually taken photographs of the bird.

Two days later I passed by the marshes on my way to Mara Serena for an official visit. We stopped for about half an hour, but I never even glimpsed the stork: quite disappointing. Willis later told me that the bird was last seen in the Mara around mid-November. It has now apparently moved to Amboseli, where presumably it continues to surprise and delight visiting birders. I wish I had an official assignment there...! — *Onesmas Kahindi, P O Box 74901, Nairobi.*

Records requested: Sharpe's Longclaw and Jackson's Widowbird

As part of an ongoing study of these two near-threatened Kenya endemics (see 'News', this issue) the Department of Ornithology requests records of either species from readers. Any positively-identified records with date and site, whether old or recent, will be very welcome. Please give the latitude and longitude of the sighting if possible, and as much locality information as you can. Additional observations on numbers, behaviour, plumage or breeding would be very welcome. Please send your records to: Luc Lens, Dept. Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.

Forest birds: Plantations won't do

Derek Pomeroy, P O Box 10066, Kampala, Uganda

As the extent of natural forest declines, and much of what survives is degraded in various ways, the numbers of birds and other forest inhabitants inevitably decline too. There are about 330 species of birds in Kenya's forests. Of these, roughly two-thirds are forest-dependent; they are largely confined to forests. The remainder, such as bulbuls, are less particular. But while deforestation is still continuing in most of Kenya's well-watered areas, in some places new forests are being created. These are the plantations of exotic pines and other softwoods which form significant blocks in many parts of the highlands.

Do these new forests help to provide forest habitat for birds to compensate for the loss of natural forest?

Birds of the Turbo forest plantations

From 1992 to 1994 I have been visiting three habitats in the Turbo-Soy Area of western Kenya. Two of these are plantations in the Turbo Forest Reserve about 3 km east of Turbo on the Eldoret road. One, south of the road, consists of pines (*Pinus patula*); the other, north of the road, of *Eucalyptus citriodora*. The trees in both plantations are mature, with fairly complete canopies, and the undergrowth, which consists mainly of native species, is relatively sparse. The vegetation *structure* thus resembles a natural forest.

For comparison with the plantations, I also included an area just to the west of the Soy Country Club. This retains the original natural vegetation of the area, albeit somewhat degraded, of a wooded savannah which grades into riverine forest in the valleys. However, since the plantations are on fairly flat upper slopes, I did not include the riverine habitats in my bird counts. The common grasses in the savannah are *Themeda triandra* and *Loudetia kagerensis*; common trees and shrubs include *Flacourtia indica*, *Clutia abyssinica*, *Rhus vulgare* and *Acacia hockii*.

A quick and easy way of comparing the birds of different habitats is by 'timed species counts'. In these, only the bird *species* are counted, in the order in which they are seen (or heard), for a fixed period (in this case, one hour). Birds recorded in the first ten minutes score 6, in the next ten minutes 5, and so on. After several counts, the commonest birds will have the highest average scores because they occur in most of the counts and are usually noted early on in the count.

What did I find? First of all, the plantations support few species. I recorded an average of 24 species in an hour in the wooded savannah, but only 11 in the Eu*calyptus* and six in the pines. Second, not only are there fewer species in the plantations, but hardly any of them are forest-dependent: nine in the well-wooded parts of the savannah, eight in the *Eucalyptus* and four in the pines. Interestingly, the most conspicuous of these forest birds in the plantations are the flycatchers. The White-eyed Slaty and Dusky Flycatchers are both common in the E*ucalyptus*; the Paradise Flycatcher, which is not forest-dependent, occurs in all three habitats. The commonest bird in the savannah at Soy is the Fiscal, closely followed by the Common Bulbul — the only species to feature in the top five in all three habitats.

Altogether, the pines are estimated to hold about 25 species (only a few of them resident there), as compared to more than 40 in the *Eucalyptus* and at least 120 in the savannah.

Other wildlife

Butterflies are often seen in the plantations, but they seem much less common than in natural forest. Several species of mammals were recorded, including Aardvark, Bushpig and a species of duiker which was once glimpsed in the pines. On the whole, plantations seem to be poor habitats for all kinds of wildlife.

What can we conclude?

There are birds in plantations, although one can often walk for 20 minutes or more in the pines without either seeing or hearing one. There are even a few forest-dependent species, although very few compared to a natural forest such as Kakamega, which is some 30 km to the South-east. But even the natural savannah, some of which was turned into plantation forest, holds more forest species.

So plantations clearly do little to help conserve Kenya's diminishing forest fauna. This does not mean that they have *no* environmental value, because the availability of softwoods helps to reduce the pressure on the natural forest.

Acknowledgements

I should like to thanks Perpetua Ipulet, who identified the plants, and several friends and students of Moi University who assisted in the bird counts.

BirdWord solution

These are the hidden words in the puzzle in *Kenya Birds* 3(2): Akalat, Booby, Buttonquail, Coot, Coucal, Crake, Dunlin, Finfoot, Grebe, Hawk, Longbill, Owlet, Prinia, Prion, Rook, Stint, Tern, Tit and Whydah.

Extinction, endangerment and everything

Nigel Collar
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On 3 June 1844, 150 years to ago to the very day that was designated, by some rich irony, World Environment Day, the last pair of Great Auks, one of the most intriguing of the planet's vanished birds (the original penguin, or 'pin-wing') was slaughtered, she still incubating an egg, at Eldey Rock off the coast of Iceland. In the same year the last specimen of the Tahitian Parakeet was collected. Fifty years later, in 1894, the Kona Finch on Mauna Loa, Hawaii, made its final appearance, and a lighthouse keeper's cat discovered and simultaneously disposed of the Stephen Island Wren. For good measure, in 1944 the last captive Pink-headed Duck departed this world, and the last Laysan Rail was seen alive.

Altogether, then, 1994 is a bad year for ornithological centenaries, half-centenaries and centenaries-and-a-half, much worse than any other in this last decade of the millennium. These sad conjunctions are a timely bid by the dead for our attention and respect, and a firm reminder of what our work as conservationists is ultimately for.

Looked at full square, however, the future presents a landscape of despair, a patchwork of gardens called protected areas thinning back to a bare, birdless horizon; and everywhere within it empty spaces where species used to be. No-one really has a clear idea about the present rate of disappearance of species, but everyone suspects that it is high, and everyone knows that it is accelerating.

The conservation world's main response has been to recast its thinking on a larger scale: the very word 'biodiversity' was born of our inability to be, literally, specific about the extinction issue. It is a word to embrace everything alive, the known, the unknown and even (but perhaps most importantly) the unknowable.

The trouble is, of course, that if biodiversity means everything, then it can be made to mean anything, as long as wildlife gets a mention: so panic, profiteering and pretence all find space to press through its overarching gate. You can sense it in the stampede to build databases at all costs, as if the most important protected areas in which biodiversity can find its ultimate sanctuary are pieces of software. You can hear it in the crescendo of claims being laid by museums to the entire territory of nature as the fiefdom of systematists. You can smell it as the words of all-powerful politicians — and, like Humpty Dumpty, when they use words they mean just what they choose them to mean — distort and decompose under our very noses.

All the same, biodiversity the concept has retained a vigour and vitality that springs from the great motivating force of human feeling for the particularities of nature that, paradoxically, the term was expected to supplant. It was very striking that when both media and politicians at the Rio summit had to find a shorthand expression for the function of the nascent Biodiversity Convention, they could only ever refer to it as the global convention for threatened species. Biodiversity, all of a sudden, was no longer everything; instead it was everything that is on the brink of becoming nothing. Biodiversity only really comes to life, it turns out, if it is made to stand for what we are about to put to death.

There is every good reason that it should. If biodiversity stands for all life on earth, then obviously we ought to be most concerned for those parts of it that we are most at risk of losing. The indissoluble link between the seemingly opposed concepts of biodiversity and extinction is threatened species. So our first obligations are not to panic, which gives priority to anything and everything that catches the eye or squeezes the heart; not to be seduced by the inviting power and security of buzzwords; and most of all to be ready, whose chief requisite is knowledge, solid, real and relevant.

We can draw such knowledge from consideration of the three interrelated conditions that concern us: death, sickness and health — extinction, endangerment and (for want of a better phrase) everything else. The extinct are yesterday's threatened species, and their study is essential. Conservation biologists are intensifying their research into the processes involved in species loss, and more and more is being learnt about the significance of certain biological traits such as overall range size, patchiness, ecological specialisation, population size, sensitivity to disturbance and dispersive ability. New analysis of the case of the Passenger Pigeon. for example, has shown that, far from hunting being the scourge it has long been thought, far from there being some indefinite social trigger to breeding, it was plain, pure habitat destruction and its own problematic specialisation (on mast, a food resource patchy in both space and time) that killed the creature off.

At the other end of the scale, biodiversity studies can certainly abet the cause of threatened species if they are sufficiently rigorous in concept and execution. BirdLife's own *Putting biodiversity on the map*, a practical guide to 221 terrestrial centres of endemism at the global level, resulted from the accumulation of thousands of records of species with ranges less than 500,000 km^2. Unsurprisingly, a very high proportion (77%) of these species are threatened, since range restriction itself is a major indicator of susceptibility to extinction. Evidence of the richness and, more importantly, the uniqueness of particular areas — all logged in a database for instant access and analysis — can only enhance the claims of individual species that occur in them to conservation attention.

The danger of biodiversity databases, however, is that they are somehow expected to hold, and be the answer to, everything; in truth, to have any ultimate value, it has to be crystal clear from the outset why they are wanted, what they are for. For databases to help, they have to be planned with enormous care and foresight and with complete understanding of the required outputs.

Meanwhile, between the dead and the dandy lie the diseased, the most pressing and central concern of every doctor. The basic requirement here is to know what it is that is most likely to be lost, when, where and why. The latest evidence from the birds, published in *Birds to watch 2: the world checklist of threatened birds* (and using the most recently developed criteria for identifying such taxa) is that 1,100 species now qualify as at risk, with very approximately another thousand crowding on the fringes of endangerment.

If we begin now with the 1,100 species, with the analysis of their key sites (the Important Bird Areas concept), with Endemic Birds Areas from *Putting biodiversity on the map*, and with a redoubled commitment to still more documentation, building and building our data and reprocessing and repackaging them into national conservation strategies and other formats, something may yet be salvaged.

But it is as well to remember that, whatever is achieved, from now on there will be no happy endings. In twenty-first century conservation all the endings will either take the form of extinctions, which are not happy, or bed down into permanent holding operations, which are of course no endings at all.

[Editors' note: This is a condensed version of an article that first appeared in World Birdwatch *in June 1994. We thank the author and BirdLife International for permission to reproduce it here.]*

Profile: Brian Finch

Jonathan Scott
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There was a time when the uninitiated thought bird watching to be a little like train-spotting — a rather quaint obsession. Try telling that to Brian Finch, long-time resident of Australia and Papua New Guinea, who for the past eight years has called Kenya his home. In 1985 Brian met Geoff and Jorie Kent during their visit to Papua New Guinea, and they invited him to join Abercrombie and Kent to develop ornithological safaris for the company throughout East and Central Africa.

'Finch' quickly made his mark: not just as one of the elite half-dozen ornithologists in East Africa whose knowledge of birds extends far beyond this continent (he is co-author of the Princeton field guide to New Guinea Birds), but also as a fine field naturalist with a zany sense of humour. His love of all things feathered is rivalled by a keen knowledge of trees and reptiles, butterflies and moths: if it has a name then 'Finch' knows it. A morning's walk around the grounds of his base, Kichwa Tembo tented camp in the Masai Mara, or a climb to the top of the Isuria Escarpment, transforms stretching one's legs into a learning experience. Brian distinguishes himself by his unerring ability to recognise the hidden bird, imitating its call so perfectly that the bird's curiosity not infrequently overcomes its shyness and it appears, as if by magic. He is one of those fortunate people who are blessed with an elephantine memory: put a name to a species and it is indelibly lodged there. But one should not be fooled by all the name dropping. Brian's knowledge is deep-rooted, whether he is discussing the biology of migration that unerringly guides the tiny Caspian Plover to the Mara from far off southern Asia, or elaborating on the breeding behaviour of d'Arnaud's Barbet.

Threatened birds of Kenya: 6. Grey-crested Helmet Shrike

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Many of Kenya's rare and threatened species are correspondingly elusive and difficult to see. Abbott's Starling and Turner's Eremomela do not exactly shout their presence from the treetops; it takes patience and determination to track down an East Coast Akalat or a Papyrus Yellow Warbler; and the Spotted Ground Thrush has been known to drive normally calm and well-balanced birders to distraction through its complete invisibility.

The Grey-crested Helmet Shrike *should* be different, since members of the family Prionopidae are nothing if not conspicuous. The birds themselves are a decent size, strikingly patterned and — the clincher — highly sociable, always in active, noisy family parties that can be heard from far away. Their characteristic chattering, whistling and bill-snapping calls are hard to describe, but no other Kenyan birds produce remotely similar noises. Altogether, Helmet Shrikes make their presence felt; their style is definitely 'look-folks-here-we-are!' rather than 'let's-fade-quietly-into-the-vegetation-like-boring-greenbuls'.

All the more strange, then, that the Grey-crested Helmet Shrike is so little recorded and so poorly understood. *Prionops poliolophus* is one of a suite of

species found only in the woodland and grassland habitats that are centred on the Serengeti-Mara ecosystem of northern Tanzania and southern Kenya. This region is one of the world's 221 recognised 'endemic bird areas': places that hold two or more bird species with especially small global ranges (less than 50,000 km^2: see *Kenya Birds* 3: 38).

Other 'restricted-range' species in the Serengeti-Mara EBA include the Grey-breasted Spurfowl, Fischer's Lovebird, Usambiro Barbet and Rufous-tailed Weaver (which is so peculiar that it occupies its very own genus, *Histurgops*). For reasons best known to themselves, none of these species except the Usambiro Barbet crosses into Kenya, despite apparently similar habitat on both sides of the border. (The Rufous-tailed Weaver has got very close, so it is worth keeping an eye out!) However, both the Usambiro Barbet and Grey-crested Helmet Shrike have been recorded well up the Rift Valley, round the southern corner of the Mau highlands, at Naivasha and Nakuru respectively.

Grey-crested Helmet Shrike — *Edwin Selempo*

In the updated *Birds to watch*, the list of the world's threatened birds produced by BirdLife International, the Grey-crested Helmet Shrike is listed as vulnerable. The reasons are its small range and (presumed) small and declining population. However, we still know very little about its exact status. The species seems to prefer open woodland, especially where there is whistling thorn (*Acacia drepanolobium*) and leleshwa (*Tarchonanthus camphoratus*). Its stronghold is probably in the areas close to the Kenya-Tanzania border: it is regularly seen at Siana Springs, north-east of the Mara, where it may be resident, and in the Sabaringo Valley to the West (see *Birding in and around the Masai Mara*, this issue). In the past there have been regular records from the Keekorok and Narok areas, and there is a recent sighting from south Nguruman, across the other side of the Loita Hills.

The very first specimen was shot on its nest at Naivasha in May 1884 (well, that was how ornithologists behaved in those days...). The birds seem to have got the message, since records from the Naivasha area stopped abruptly in 1926. It was assumed that the birds were locally extinct, perhaps because of habitat destruction, from this section of the Rift Valley, which is of course one of the best-watched parts of Kenya. Then a group was recorded in Lake Nakuru National Park in October 1978; more records from the Nakuru/Menengai area followed, and a party of eight, including immature birds, was seen on the south-western slopes of Mt Longonot near Naivasha in July 1979. Since then, there has been a rash of records, in most months of the year, from Kedong, Elmenteita and Nakuru — including, most excitingly, a group of nine birds feeding several chicks at Lake Nakuru in July 1989. (Like other species of helmet shrikes, the Grey-crested are cooperative breeders: all members of the family group help to raise the young.)

This pattern of records fits with a species that is genuinely scarce (for unknown reasons) and that has an extremely large foraging range when it is not breeding (again for unknown reasons: the common one is specialised food requirements). It is also possible that birders are confusing this species with the very similar, although much commoner, Helmet Shrike *Prionops plumata.* Both species are chunky black-and-white birds, with greyish heads, a white bar on the wing and white tips to the tail. The Grey-crested, *P. poliolopha*, differs from *plumata* in its larger size, in lacking a yellow wattle around the eye, and in the tufty grey crest on the hind-crown and the blackish spot on the side of the breast. Most of these characters are difficult to be sure of in the field, however, especially if one is not familiar with the two species. Size is tricky; both species have a yellow eye, so one would need a good look to be sure that there was no yellow wattle; and *plumata* also has a grey hind-crown, although no grey crest. **Both** species have a whitish forehead crest, so that it not much help. The blackish spot on the side of the breast is thus the best single feature — ideally seen from in front, and in combination with the other characters.

A challenging study awaits the ornithologist who wants to pin down the status and natural history of this intriguing species. In the meantime, if you see a group — let *Kenya Birds* know!

Acknowledgement
Not having seen a Grey-crested Helmet Shrike (yet!), I have relied heavily on Adrian Lewis's excellent series of articles in *Scopus*, 1981–1983, which are recommended as further reading.

EANHS Nest Record Card Scheme

The new nest record cards are finally here, printed by courtesy of Brooke Bond Kenya. The design has been revamped to make them easier to use and to conform to the format of the Ornithology Department's bird distribution database. This is a trial design and constructive suggestions for the next edition will be welcome. For cards, and instructions on filling them in, contact Joseph Oyugi, EANHS Nest Record Scheme Organiser, P O Box 44486, Nairobi.

Bird publications for sale

'Waterbirds in the southern Kenya Rift Valley, July 1993 and January 1994' (NMK Ornithology Research Report no. 13). This report gives a detailed analysis of the July 1993 and January 1994 waterbird counts, including trends over the last four years. **KSh 100/-** (UK £1.50. P&p KSh 10/- local, UK £1 overseas).

'New records for the Bird Atlas of Kenya, 1984–1994' ((NMK Ornithology Research Report no. 17). Summarises all available published and unpublished records for those wishing to update their copies of the Bird Atlas. **KSh 200/-** (UK £3.00. P&p KSh 15/- local, UK £2 overseas).

'World Birdwatch List of the Birds of Kenya' An illustrated wall poster listing all Kenya's birds and indicating those seen during the October 1993 birdwatch. **KSh 15/-** (UK £0.30. P&p KSh 10/- local, UK £1 overseas).

These are all available from the EANHS office or the Ornithology Department, National Museums of Kenya. If you would like to order by post, please do so through the Ornithology Department; make cheques payable to 'BirdLife Kenya' and remember to add post and packing charges.

Bird Family Profiles: 6
Cuckoos

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Cuckoos are renowned for their voices and their notorious habit of laying eggs in the nests of other species, so-called brood parasitism. Fourteen species have been recorded in Kenya, many of which, despite their being hard to see, are widespread and common. Anyone who has searched for a calling Red-chested Cuckoo knows just how well these species can blend into deep vegetation. They form a fascinating group, the Cuculidae, a family which includes the four species of coucals, which are equally well known for their bottle draining voices (so-called water-bottle-birds). I mainly deal with the savannah species here (listed with their scientific names at the end of the article), but there are some fascinating forest birds too, like the Emerald Cuckoo, familiar to everyone in Nairobi with its 'Hello-Judy' call, and the shy and poorly known Thick-billed Cuckoo of coastal forest which parasitises the helmet-shrikes.

The commoner savannah cuckoos are grouped in three principal genera: *Clamator*, with three large noisy species; *Cuculus*, three grey species in the same genus as the Eurasian Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*; and the glossy cuckoos, *Chrysococcyx*, Didric's and Klaas', that have bright iridescent feathers. They are a ubiquitous group of medium-sized birds, tending to be slim and long-winged. All have longish, thick, decurved, hooked bills and feet with the first and fourth toes pointing backwards (an arrangement called 'zygodactyl'). Apart from the metallic males of Klaas' and Didric, they are generally dull-plumaged. Their flight is swift, often hawk-like, so much so that smaller birds often react in alarm to their passing silhouettes.

Cuckoos exploit a wide range of habitats from open, dry wooded grassland to wetter woodlands and forest edge. They are all diurnal, preferring to call in the early morning and evenings, and with breeding seasons that are varied and tied to those of host species. Males make themselves conspicuous, calling their simple songs loudly, both from perches and in flight. Calls of species like the Black and Red-chested Cuckoos have led to a popular name of 'fever-birds', with calling so persistent that some people have been driven to shoot them. A popular interpretation of the Red-chested Cuckoo's call is "it will rain, it will rain". They are certainly widely considered harbingers of welcome wet weather. Female cuckoos

are far more secretive and silent, developing skills of stealth which allow them to lay their eggs in hosts' nests.

True cuckoos are largely insectivorous and feed on noxious, hairy and spiny caterpillars which are avoided by most other birds, preparing them in a manner similar to the bees prepared by bee-eaters. Once caught, the insects are mandibulated back and forth along the bill. One end is then held and quick flicks in the air or against a perch cause the caterpillar's insides to fly out. The skin is then devoured. Cuckoos may gather to feed at termite emergences. They may search vegetation intently, gleaning insects, or perch for long periods, dropping into vegetation or onto the ground to catch prey.

All cuckoos are brood parasites and they are the best known, but not the only parasitic families in Africa: the honeyguides, the whydahs and indigobirds, as well as a weaver species, the Cuckoo or Parasitic Weaver also lay their eggs in other birds' nests. Brood parasitism brings obvious benefits. No nest needs to be built, investment in parental care can be abandoned, and more eggs can be laid. Serious problems result for hosts which may have to rear a young cuckoo, however, and, as a result, cuckoos and their hosts are locked in an escalating evolutionary 'arms race'. Cuckoos evolve tactics, such as egg mimicry, to baffle their hosts, challenging them to hone their skills at recognising and ejecting cuckoo eggs. No host rears a cuckoo willingly, so adaptations evolve on both sides of the conflict.

Host selection is critical. Cuckoos generally parasitise bird species smaller than themselves (with the exception of Greater Spotted Cuckoo which specialises on crows, but which also parasitises starlings). Hosts are: Levaillant's Cuckoo — Arrow-marked Babbler; Black and White Cuckoo — bulbuls; African Cuckoo — Drongo; Black Cuckoo — bush shrikes; Klaas' Cuckoo — mainly sunbirds, and Didric Cuckoo — weavers. The spectrum of hosts may be wider than the list implies, but most cuckoos tend to specialise, and this appears to confer advantages.

In most cuckoos males play no role after mating. Females tend to sit quietly, observing the proposed host's nest over a long period of time before slipping in unobserved. Their timing is vital and in all cases they check the state of the host's nest and eggs. Lay too early and the host may desert, too late and their egg will not hatch. A female's approach may not be successful at first and several attempts (even over 2–3 days) may be needed before an egg is deposited. It is likely she keeps tabs on several nests in her range, monitoring them before moving in for the lay. Female cuckoos can lay very quickly and may need to be on the nest no more than a few seconds (other species need three minutes to several hours). Eggs are small for their size (averaging 3% of body weight) which helps them lay fast.

Speed may be especially important for cuckoos approaching colonies where there are numerous watchful guards.

Generally one host nest contains one cuckoo egg, but they occasionally remove a host's egg (during a reconnaissance or at laying). Managing the number of eggs in the clutch helps confuse the host, although some host species appear to be unconcerned about the number of eggs they incubate. Eggs removed may be dropped or carried off, and are also occasionally eaten. Some hosts happily incubate strange eggs, but more commonly eject them or desert and renest. Consequently, cuckoos mimic host egg patterns with varying degrees of success from slight to total mimicry, e.g. Great Spotted Cuckoos mimic Pied Crows' eggs and Didric Cuckoos mimic the eggs of Black-headed Weavers (among other species: several different types of host mimicry occur within this one species). Host young rarely survive (if they hatch at all), and most observations are of young cuckoos alone in the nest. The large *Clamator* cuckoos do not eject eggs or nest mates, but hatch earlier, grow faster and straddle the nest so that their nest mates are starved. Other cuckoos eject, although the urge only lasts for 2-4 days after hatching. Black Cuckoo chicks, for example, manoeuvre eggs or nest mates onto their backs, hold them there with wing-stubs, and tip them out of the nest.

Levaillant's Cuckoo is a possible exception as their young are raised with the Arrow-marked Babblers brood. As co-operative breeders, the babblers have helpers assisting feeding their young. Provisioning an extra beak is less of a burden with the extra foraging power of helping adults. Cuckoo chicks may also mimic their host's begging calls. The young of Great Spotted Cuckoos mimic those of Pied Crows and Levaillant's Cuckoos mimic Arrow-marked Babblers. Unlike whydahs, whose chicks mimic host gape patterns, cuckoos simply have brightly coloured gapes which focus the attention of their foster parents.

Hosts tend to look after fledgling cuckoos longer than they would their own young. Cuckoos typically spend three weeks in the nest and a month dependent after leaving. Of particular interest are the curious range of diets on which young cuckoos are raised. Insectivorous as adults, cuckoos are often fed purely grain or fruit diets as fledglings, evidently without ill-effect. Hosts feeding young cuckoos often appear a ridiculous sight. It is certainly not unusual for the host to perch on the chick's back to feed its mouth. Like young honeyguides, fledgling cuckoos are sedentary, calling plaintively from a particular perch for long periods of time. Moving around carries the risk of being mobbed by other birds in the neighbourhood.

All told, the cuckoos are a fascinating family, well worth getting to know by sight and call. If you do make any unusual observations of cuckoos and their hosts, please send them in to *Kenya Birds*!

The advanced greenbul guide

Charles Godfray
Imperial College at Silwood Park, UK

[Just when you thought it was safe to go back into the forest... As a follow up to our introductory greenbul guide in vol. 2(2), **Charles Godfray** gives you the low-down on the field characters of some greenbul species that you are *extremely* unlikely to have on your life list. Records of any of these greenbuls sent in to *Kenya Birds* will be treated with, at best, considerable suspicion. — *Editors.*]

Olive Greenbul ***Andropadus olivacea.*** Olive back, olive wings, olive throat, olive belly; eye colour: olive.

Olive-throated Greenbul ***Andropadus olivacerrimi.*** Similar to the Olive Greenbul but with a more olive throat.

Olive-backed Olive-throated Greenbul ***Andropadus olivacissimus.*** Similar to the Olive Greenbul and the Olive-throated Greenbul but easily differentiated by the distinctive extra oliveness of the back.

The Greenbul's Greenbul ***Andropadus olivaceaperfecta.*** Similar to the preceding species but distinguished by a special quality to its oliveness that renders this bird the species that other Greenbuls aspire to. Song distinctive but unknown.

Rüppell's Crimson Greenbul ***Andropadus ruppelli.*** Olive back, olive wings, olive throat, olive belly; eye colour: olive. Named after Otto Rüppell, the famous colour-blind German ornithologist.

Harlequin Just-joking Greenbul ***Andropadus pseudotechnicolor.*** Distinguished by the complete absence of bright red and blue markings, or indeed of markings in any colour other than olive. Voice similar to Olive Greenbul but more so.

Prigogine's Ground Greenbul ***Andropadus intoxicata.*** A Kibale Forest endemic, recorded by Priogine from a single specimen that drowned itself in a jerrycan of ton-ton late one night. Unfortunately the specimen was not recovered the next day but Prigogine's description is of an olive greenbul with four eyes, two beaks and four wings. Known vocalisations: a soft splashing sound.

Mimic Greenbul ***Andropadus bananarama.*** Olive back, olive wings, olive throat, olive belly; eye colour: olive. Most easily recognised by its ability to mimic every other bird in the forest. If you hear a trogon or a cuckoo but on looking through your binoculars see an olive-coloured greenbul, it is probably this species (or possibly one of the above).

Monkey-eating Olive Greenbul ***Andropadus circopithephagus.*** Olive back, olive wings, olive throat, olive belly; eye colour: olive; weight 24 kg.

Myopic Greenbul ***Andropadus spectabilis.*** Olive back, olive wings, olive throat, olive belly; eye colour: olive. A bird that often flies directly towards ornithologists who are using binoculars and which, in the few seconds before impact, can be confused with a distant Monkey-eating Olive Greenbul. A relative of the extinct Toro-toro Olive Kamikazi Greenbul.

Miserable Greenbul ***Andropadus suicidis.*** Similar to the Joyful Greenbul, but altogether more olive and with a droning song. Creeps about in low growth, especially in depressions.

Greenbul Cisticola ***Cisticola andropadus.*** Olive back, olive wings, olive throat, olive belly; eye colour: olive. Thought to be an Olive Greenbul until December 1993 when a DNA sample analysed by Sibley & Ahlquist conclusively proved it to be a warbler in the genus Cisticola, genetically very close to Chubb's Cisticola.

Chubb's Cisticola Greenbul ***Andropadus cisticola.*** Upperparts dark brown, slightly russet on the head, with ill defined streaking; below grey, paler on the throat. Thought to be a Chubb's Cisticola until December 1993 when a DNA sample analysed by Sibley & Ahlquist conclusively proved it to be a Greenbul in the genus Andropadus, genetically very close to the Olive Greenbul.

Red-crested Greenbul ***Andropadus confusata***. The olive greenbul with a red crest illustrated by Swilliams (see A Rather Vague Field Guide to Birds of East Africa, Plate 26 — the illustration of a brown bird with a bluish crest) is of the now extinct Pemba Island race. The nominate mainland race is similar except that it lacks the red crest and is completely olive. (Note: the other greenbuls discussed in this guide are either ignored by Swilliams or treated as allied species of the Red-crested Greenbul, with the exception of the Olive-throated Greenbul which appears as an allied species of the Variable Sunbird).

Lumberjack Greenbul ***Andropadus timberi***. A rare olive greenbul with a distinctive male song that resembles a muffled chain saw. This is thought to be a sexually-selected signal of male quality, since females fly long distances to sacrifice themselves hopelessly to real chain saws. An endangered species now, only existing in the centre of large tracts of undisturbed forest.

Operatic Greenbul ***Andropadus puccini***. Another olive greenbul with a distinctive song which resembles the first 24 bars of 'Nessum dorma'. Can be confused with the Mimetic Greenbul but only the present species responds to shouts of "Encore!". Two related extralimital species are Wagner's Greenbul, which has a shrieking song delivered from a high perch continuously for up to four hours, and Stockhausen's Greenbul, which has an unusual song reminiscent of defective plumbing.

Morning **Bird Walks** led by Fleur Ng'weno and Damaris Rotich continue every Wednesday. Meet at 8:45 am at the National Museums entrance for a walk in the Nairobi area. These walks are for EANHS members: non-members are welcome but requested to join the Society (see below).

East Africa Natural History Society. All birders in East Africa should join this Society, which offers lectures, excursions and publications with a strong bird focus. Sub-committees of the Society include the OS-c and BirdLife Kenya. The EANHS also organises ringing and nest record schemes in Eastern Africa. For membership details: tel. 749957, or write to the Hon. Secretary, EANHS, P O Box 44486 Nairobi. The office at the National Museums of Kenya is open each weekday (closed Wednesday morning).

Scopus, the lively regional journal of ornithology, is published three times a year by the OS-c and can be obtained from the OS-c Hon. Treasurer and Secretary Don Turner, P.O. Box 48019, Nairobi, Kenya (tel. Nairobi 48133). The annual subscription is KSh 600 (KSh 650 up-country); overseas rates available from Don Turner. Records are welcomed from the East African Bird Report which forms the third issue of *Scopus* each year.

BirdLife Kenya offers for sale notelets (showing attractive pen and ink drawings by Dale Zimmerman), postcards (showing the endemic birds of Arabuko-Sokoke Forest in a painting by Norman Arlott) and T-shirts (with a Crowned Eagle motif by Simon Thomsett). These are available from the Department of Ornithology and the EANHS office. The proceeds go to bird conservation projects.

African Bird Club. To join this society, which produces an excellent colour Bulletin and aims to provide 'a worldwide focus for African ornithology', write to: African Bird Club, c/o BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Rd., Cambridge CB3 0NA, UK. Membership presently costs UK £12 per year.

Still wanted! The Department of Ornithology needs one or more copies of Mackworth-Praed and Grant's two-volume *Handbook of African Birds (Series 1: East and North-eastern Africa)* for use in its field surveys. If anyone has these books for sale, please contact the Department.

Ninth Pan-African Ornithological Congress, 1–8 December 1996, Accra, Ghana. For further information write to the Congress Chairman, Yaa Ntiamoa-Baidu, Ghana Wildlife Society, P O Box 13252, Accra, Ghana.

EANHS Nest Record Card Scheme. For information and cards, contact the Nest Record Scheme Organiser, Joseph Oyugi, at the Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya.

Contacts: For queries concerning *Kenya Birds*, write to the Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya, P O Box 40658, Nairobi, or telephone 742131/61, extension 243. For BirdLife Kenya, telephone Nairobi 749957; fax 741049.

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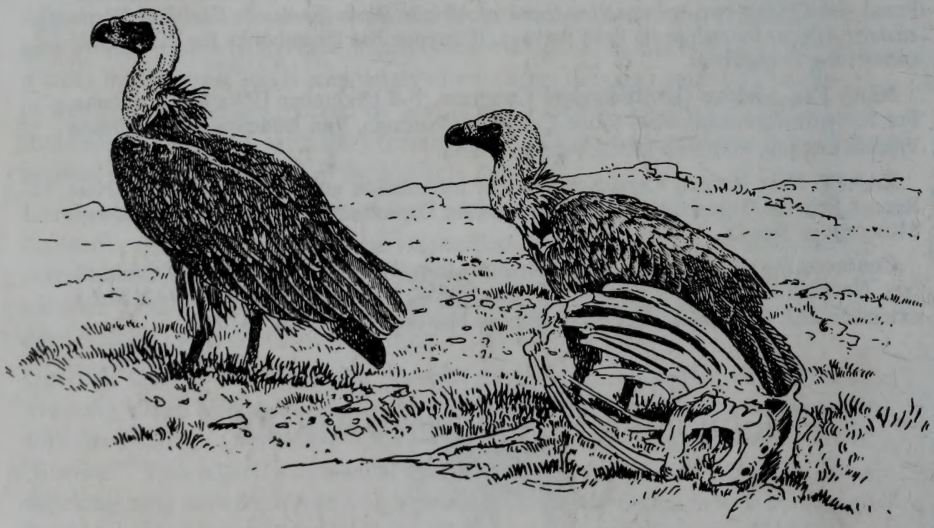

White-backed Vultures — *Martin Woodcock*